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Life of Armelle Nico



ARMELLE NICOLAS

Nicolas, Armelle

**THE LIFE OF
ARMELLE NICOLAS**

A PEASANT BY BIRTH

BY OCCUPATION A SERVANT

commonly called

"THE GOOD ARMELLE"

in her ineffable converse with God

"THE DAUGHTER OF LOVE"

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY

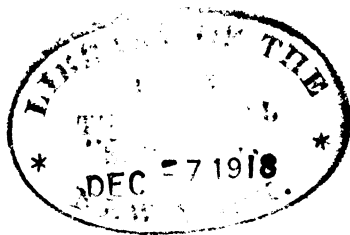
THOMAS TAYLOR ALLEN

(Translator of "The Autobiography of Madame Guyon")

WITH INTRODUCTORY LETTER BY THE LATE

PROF. EDWARD DOWDEN

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INTRODUCTORY LETTER BY PROFESSOR DOWDEN

TRINITY COLLEGE

DUBLIN, March 17th, 1899

MY DEAR ALLEN,

I have read with great interest your reduced translation of the Life of *La bonne Armelle*. The reduction I am sure is judiciously made, and as to your work as translator you have been most happy in preserving the character of the original, in which deep things are recorded with a kind of ardent simplicity.

The question of the authorship, whether by the Ursuline nun or with a rehandling by Dom Echallard, hardly entered into my consideration as I read. I took the book as a thing lived and made out of life by somebody and, as such, having in all that is best its own self-verification.

It is certainly remarkable that such a book should now have passed so much out of sight. I know your *Mme Guyon*, of course, and *St Teresa's Autobiography*, and *St John of the Cross* ;

▼

and it seems to me that in *La bonne Armelle* (especially in the later chapters) are things as true and as beautifully said as in any of these other books. It lacks no doubt the historical interest connected with persons known to all the world and influential through the foundation of Houses, or the strife of prelates. But its very humbleness in outward circumstance gives it a peculiar place of its own. The life of a domestic servant, who did her household work faithfully, yet who became the subject and scene of inner experience so wonderful, is distinguished by its very modesty of circumstance.

Although now and again something occurs which is specially related to Roman Catholicism, in essentials the book transcends any single communion, or Church, and belongs to every one who has heard the same voice that Armelle heard. There are pages for which I do not care, in which descriptions are attempted, by imagery or otherwise, of what cannot be described ; but that is the case with other books of the group to which this belongs. In that group I think it takes a worthy place by virtue of its best chapters—those to which the other chapters form the natural and necessary introduction—and perhaps, by virtue of the obscurity of Armelle's outward life, it takes a unique place. The disinterestedness of love,

Introductory Letter

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the supersession of self, the union of what is above self, are expressed with a beautiful sincerity of experience which is not surpassed in books more famous.

I hope you will carry out your intention of publishing it. Readers for it there must be, though I cannot guess whether they would be many or few.

Sincerely yours,

EDWARD DOWDEN

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

THE name of the subject of this Biography is probably entirely unknown to the English-speaking world notwithstanding the wide popularity of the work when it appeared in France. Printed for the first time in 1676, five years after the death of Armelle, the third edition, from which this translation has been made, appeared at Cologne in 1704 after careful corrections by the celebrated Peter Poiret. It was translated into German and published in 1708, with a second edition in 1719. There appears also to have been a Dutch translation issued. In English a short account of Armelle was given in a pamphlet by the anonymous Bristol translator of *Madame Guyon's Life* in 1772.

This Life, mainly autobiographical, was compiled by an Ursuline nun known as Jeanne of the Nativity under the circumstances detailed in a Prefatory Letter to the Superior and members of her Community. She had become intimately attached to Armelle during the latter's service at their Convent, and in repeated conversations

learned from her the previous experiences she had passed through. A subsequent order from the Spiritual Director required Armelle to open herself fully to this friend. The Superior and others requested Jeanne to commit to writing the valuable materials she had acquired that others also might be edified, but distrusting her own abilities and wanting leisure, Jeanne long hesitated and postponed the task. At last, owing to their urgency and an interior movement, she could not resist. "On Christmas Eve 1650 I withdrew into my cell," she says, "and prayed Our Lord that if it was his will he would be pleased to furnish the matter and suitable conceptions, for as for myself I had none, and knew not how to begin. After that I set myself to write, and this I did with such facility that the pen could hardly follow the thoughts of my mind, so that before going to Matins I had finished the first chapter without any further industry or application on my part than the simple expression of matters that presented themselves to my thought." Thus nine or ten chapters were written when a doubt as to whether her memory was trustworthy perplexed her and she feared to consult Armelle for its resolution, lest the humility of the latter should revolt at the project. This difficulty was removed by Armelle herself who,

having entered on a still deeper state of spiritual life, was impelled to wish that others also should learn her experiences "that after her death God might be praised, loved, and thanked." Finding her in this disposition, the chapters already written were read over for her correction, and the rest of the work was similarly completed practically from her dictation.

Barbier¹ is disposed to throw a doubt on this authorship, suggesting one Dom Olivier Echallard, a Benedictine, as the real compiler ; but I have been unable to discover any foundation for this surmise.

The various letters and authorizations prefixed to Poiret's edition, emanating as they do from the Higher Church dignitaries of the province where she lived, and written at the time of Armelle's decease, seem to me conclusive. In the original the work consists of over eight hundred close printed pages divided into two books—the first, narrative, the second mainly didactic, illustrating the saintly character of Armelle as possessor of each Christian virtue. I can well believe that the whole work was carefully revised and perhaps this second book composed by another hand than the Ursuline nun ; but the narrative and the details of Armelle's experiences are, I believe, as

¹ *Dictionnaire des ouvrages anonymes*, Paris, 1872.

stated, the faithful record of Armelle's own account taken down by her sympathizing friend. In cutting down the vast bulk I have given only a few paragraphs from the second book, and reduced the first book by omitting certain repetitions and comments for which the compiler, not Armelle, is responsible. I have been careful to preserve entire, with little exception, Armelle's experiences related in Armelle's own words.

To understand such experiences is beyond the scope of metaphysics and modern philosophy ; the seeing eye needs neither to perceive the sun shining before it. Let the candid inquirer study Plato's simile of the dwellers in the den and open his mind to receive it as a simple statement of actual fact. The percipient in man is not this or that organ, nor yet the totality of those organs, but the central spirit (pneuma), which muffled up at present in psyche and body is thus cut off from cognizance of the external world save through the avenues of those organs. But when through any cause the pressure of these mufflers is relaxed, or by superior illumination the spirit is enabled to transcend them, its inherent power of perception is enjoyed with a certainty and conviction of truth that nothing can disturb.

An illustration of the true nature of man, as spirit muffled by psyche and body, may be found

in an electric lamp with the incandescent centre surrounded by an opal shade and a green outer covering.

From the earliest times such illuminés have not been wanting in the Christian community. With these there is nothing in the nature of historical development, each one has for herself had the barriers removed and gazed upon the True Light, while Confessors and Spiritual Directors have collected and endeavoured to systematize in terms of the intellect the experiences related by their penitents. With these systems¹ the late Bampton Lectures on Christian Mysticism deal in a sympathetic spirit ; but wide is the difference between such second-hand learned treatises and the direct experiences of the Saint whose spirit eye has been opened to see. "Many the thyrus bearers but few the true Mystics."

The word Mystic or Mysticism to the average educated Englishman suggests from mere similarity of sound something of mistiness and obscurity, whereas its real significance is the direct contrary. The Mystic is he who has been initiated into reality, while fools run about the world swayed by mere opinion—the man whose soul has been illuminated by the true sun of the upper world, while the denizens of the cave he

¹ This Preface was written about 1899.

has left employ themselves in guessing the sequence and relations of mere shadows, thrown upon a wall by the torch-light of sensual reason. The French *illuminé* far more accurately represents the ancient use of the word ; but among the Roman Catholics they are generally styled spiritual writers, or writers on the interior way. Whatever the name, however, the important fact to be remembered is that the subject dealt with is reality, as opposed to phenomena, with which alone the physical and psychic worlds make us acquainted. It is no mere quickening of the imagination or intellect which takes place when the Divine Spirit has been allowed to enter the centre of the human spirit (pneuma) ; but the substance of the human pneuma is then actually changed—vivified and made infinitely brighter by the influx and the assimilation of the Divine substantial effluence infused ; and this change manifests itself primarily through the Will, in a complete change of purpose and motive. The whole conduct of life is altered ; what before was sought eagerly is scorned and rejected ; what was rejected with scorn is eagerly sought. Nothing is more practical and purposeful than the lives of the most eminent Saints. Consider the two Catherines, of Sienna and of Genoa ; St Theresa, Madam Guyon, and others—frail

women in weak health, who went through toils that would have exhausted strong men, and exhibited an activity and energy that would have done credit to famous Captains.

The activity and energy of St Paul are a favourite subject of comment: those named above, his followers, in that like him, through the extinction of self, they could say, as he did, "I live, yet not I, Christ lives in me," were in no way behind in practical efficiency, according to the measure each received. Not in metaphysic subtleties of the Intellect, nor in vivid play of the Imagination, but in self-sacrificing service for others does the illuminated and vivified spirit employ them. William Law's definition of the Mystic will not be inappropriate here.

"Tho' if a man was to be told what is meant by a Mystical Divine he must be told of something as heavenly, as great, as desirable, as if he was told, what is meant by a real, regenerate, living, member of the Mystical Body of Christ.

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"You will perhaps say, Do I then call all the world to these Spiritual Books? No, by no means. But, I call all those whom our Saviour called to himself in these words: Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you."

Many such there surely are in this age of pessimism when "le savant nie, la prêtre doute," while the would-be practical guides can offer no better gods for vulgar adoration than Mammon and Belial (which indeed only *too universally* are worshipped in "*spirit and in truth*"); and it is to them this little book is offered. In it they will see how the lowest domestic drudgery may be exalted to a dignity above that of the highest rank in State or Church, for "Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty," and "the Spirit of the Lord giveth light and understanding to the simple." Here too they will learn that the way thereto is through Fidelity—the honestly discharging the duty at hand as in the presence of God, trusting all to His loving care.

It is possible some readers may be offended by the reference to Purgatory and the interest Armelle took in her "poor brothers." A few explanations on the subject may be useful.

A German proverb says that in emptying the dirty water from the bath one should be careful not to throw out the baby also. It would perhaps have been well had the Protestant Reformers borne it in mind when dealing with the Romish doctrine of Purgatory. Whatever the corruptions and scandals that had accreted,

¹ Letter to Dr Trapp.

there was a foundation of truth beneath, which unfortunately was then rejected. Madame Guyon thus explains the doctrine in its highest form.

Speaking of lost souls, she writes : " That it is not God who rejects them, by a volition of rejecting them, or by hatred, but by necessity, that in God the unchangeableness of love is entire for the sinner, so that, as all the cause of that rejection is in the sinner, God cannot receive him into his Grace until the cause of this rejection ceases. Now this cause does not subsist in the effect of sin, but in the will and inclination of the sinner ; so that as soon as this will and inclination ceases on the side of the sinner, however foul and horrible he may be, God purifies him by His charity and love and receives him into His grace : but as long as there remains in the man the will to sin, although from powerlessness, or lack of opportunity he does not commit the sin he wills, it is certain he would be rejected from God, owing to this perverse will. . . . If this sinner die during the time that his will is rebellious and turned towards sin, as death fixes for ever the disposition of the soul, and the cause of his impurity is still subsisting, this soul can never be purified by the Charity of God, and can consequently never be received into Him ; so that his damnation is eternal. . . . But

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if this sinner die penitent—that is to say, that the cause (which is the will to sin, is removed, and only the effect remains, which is the impurity caused by sin), however horrible and filthy the sinner may be, he ceases to be a sinner, although he does not cease to be filthy. He is then in a state to be purified. God by an infinite charity has provided a bath of love and justice, but a painful bath, to purify this soul : that bath is Purgatory, which is not in itself painful, yet is so in the cause of the pain, which is impurity.”

This statement of the doctrine substantially agrees with what Swedenborg, a man who had not the least sympathy with, or respect for, the Romish Church, declares to have been ascertained by him in his transcendental experiences. He, while fully recognizing the intermediate state between the life on this physical plane and the permanent state of spirit existence, is not always consistent with himself, and though knowing nothing of the ecclesiastical distinction between sins Venial and sins Mortal, he yet maintains that the direction taken in this life, whether upward or downward, must continue unaltered in the next state : so that those who have honestly struggled against their vices, even unsuccessfully, on earth will continue that struggle in the next stage until they are finally helped upwards to

reach the highest heavens ; those, on the contrary, who have resisted all control and set themselves to work iniquity with set design and deliberate choice, having there full scope to gratify their bent and necessarily associating with others of a similar kidney, will then pursue the downward course with an accelerated velocity until they find themselves ultimately in the lowest Hell. Of a class between the two, who in this life are seesawing between the upward and downward course, he will not hear—every one on earth, he maintains, is progressing in the one or other direction. This comes to very much the same thing as the view explained by Madame Guyon.

It remained for modern Spiritualism, ridiculed and decried as it is by ignorance and prejudice, to introduce a system of ideas philosophically coherent and far more consonant to the relations which reason insists must exist between the Father of all and the children he has given birth to. The Gospel tells us that " God is Love "—and Plato in the *Timæus* had previous to that taught the heathen world that the motive of Creation was the Goodness of God. He willed, as it were, to multiply himself ; but as this was impossible to be done in his Infinity, he called into being Finite creatures, to express, each according to his form, the perfections of Divine

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Love and Wisdom. The first condition of their doing so was that they should be self moved, that is finding their principle of action from within : not moved *ab externo* like inert matter. In that inmost centre of their being he designed to make his seat, and in proportion as they drew from this well of spiritual life, their capacities would be enlarged until they approximated ever more and more to the Infinity of himself.

Love never seeks anything for itself—to pour itself out in blessing its object is the very essence of its being. To bless with pouring into them the fulness of his perfections and happiness is the one and only mind that God could by any possibility have ever had towards any of the creatures whose end and destiny was, and is, to be the willing receptacles of that fulness. They, through the freedom of will with which they were endowed, have the ability to shut the door against those blessings ; but Love will not be baffled, and will ultimately find the means of abating that self-will without ever violating its essential freedom. With truth Law in his “ Spirit of Love ” speaks of “ that adorable Deity, whose infinite being is an infinity of mere love, an unbeginning, never-ceasing, and forever overflowing ocean of meekness, sweetness, delight, blessing, goodness, patience, and mercy ; and all this as so many blessed

streams breaking out of the abyss of universal love. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, a triune infinity of love and goodness, for ever and ever, giving forth nothing but the same gifts of light and love, of blessing and joy, whether before or after the fall, either of angels or men."

It may seem strange to some that I should couple Spiritualism with such a man as Law, but in its way it is doing the same work as he strove to do. Adopting the experimental methods of materialism and physical science, it is proving, as against materialists and sham scientists, that man persists when the physical instrument, through which he at present acts, has decayed; and as against the retailers of ancient tradition and scholastic dogmatism, that morally as he was at death, so he continues after the laying aside his mortal vesture. The conditions of his existence are altered; he, in his essential character, bent, and purpose, remains unaltered. What the body is to him on this plane, the psyche is to him then; and the externals with which he finds himself then surrounded and limited are similarly in relation to the powers of the psyche as the physical limitations of earth are to the earthly body. But the powers of the psyche are vastly greater than when muffled and dulled by its instrument

of clay. No longer so limited, the Will and Imagination of the psyche can now give an objective existence to the forms of the desires; the psyche creates its own externals, and herein lies the great difficulty of the change in direction, which Swedenborg thought impossible, for a man who has sold himself "to work all uncleanness with greediness."

He associates with his like; on earth, good and bad are mingled together, and laws, public opinion, etc., impose some restraint; at least on the external behaviour of the worst. But on the psychic stage, unless his anti-social crimes have developed an atmosphere (as in the case of a murderer) which cuts him off in isolation and darkness, he has full scope and no let from his fellows for pursuing his downward course. The penalty he no doubt reaps; the little light still in him becomes darkened, the gnawing of want bites deeper as each lawless desire gratified leaves a greater void of dissatisfaction—the thirst increases with drinking, the lust is inflamed, not satisfied, by its indulgence, and each such act, instead of being accompanied with a pleasurable sensation, as on earth, where in the physical economy the desire is coupled with a use, brings nothing but a pang of torture. In this depth of misery ever deepening, of darkness ever thicken-

Translator's Preface xxiii

ing, and of powerlessness ever increasing—even here they are not forgotten, and the instruments of their deliverance are already being prepared, to be applied whenever the Will has been so broken as to consent to guidance.

But the vast majority who leave earth are not of this type, they are rather undeveloped than wicked, and it is with such for the most part that spiritualism is conversant. Of those who on earth have resolutely struggled to live the better life, to subordinate the flesh to the spirit, to take up the yoke of Him “who is meek and lowly in spirit,” and “bearing the cross daily to follow Him”—of such it can tell us nothing. Yet they are not indifferent to our struggles here, or to the misery and helplessness of their brothers in the Abyss of darkness. From among their ranks go forth the volunteers, who, filled with the Spirit of the Saviour, extend the hand of help, wherever a ray of human affection still survives, to draw forth from their misery those unable to help themselves.

Of that great day of Consummation, when the physical and psychic worlds shall be filled with the knowledge of God and all the hells shall have been emptied of their slaves—and perhaps even Satan, finding his occupation gone, shall confess himself vanquished, and fallen angels submit to

be blessed by the Infinite Love that called them into existence for no other end: what shall I say? Only this: that he who knows the Love of God as I do looks forward to see it.

I will close these considerations, meant not for the self-satisfied many, treading the broad road of routine—slaves of opinion; but for the earnest few—candid seekers, “who have ears to hear”—with the answer which Armelle received to her perplexed prayer for the abolition of sin: “That it was a decree given in the tribunal of his divine Wisdom that men should continue in the free unfettered choice to love him or to offend him; and that according to that decree he could not force them, nor violate their freedom; but that he would draw them to him by the chains of his love.”

Three hundred years before Armelle the same in substance had been the answer our Saviour condescended to give the holy anchorite Mother Juliana of Norwich: “Sin is behoveful” [that is needful for the manifestation designed by God), “but all shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well”; and again another time, “And thou shalt see thyself that all manner of things shall be well.”

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ARMELLE NICOLAS

CHAPTER I

THIS blessed woman was born the 19th September 1606 in the Parish of Campeneac, near the town of Ploermel, in the Bishopric of St Malo. Her father was George Nicolas and her mother Frances Neant. They were moderately well off for their rank, which was that of peasants, but strong in the fear of God and much inclined to his holy service. Among her father's good qualities, his devotion was such that he spent the greater part of Festivals and Sundays in prayer while he walked about his land, in order to avoid the company and debauchery of his neighbours. He was once chosen Vestryman of his Church, and he used to call that year the happiest of his life, for never was his heart so contented. Her mother on her side endeavoured to second the good inclinations of her husband, and thus they lived very peacefully to the edification of their neighbours.

God blessed their marriage by the birth of this virtuous daughter, who was followed by another and by four boys. She was named Armelle at

the Baptismal font, and from her tender youth it appeared that God had chosen her in a special manner to make manifest in her the effects of his grace and of his love, for she was endowed with an excellent disposition, a solid judgment, a temper sweet and sociable, and an outward carriage so balanced and reserved that modesty appeared in all her actions. This made her so amiable to all her relatives and others that she was universally cherished and caressed by all, but especially by her mother, who had for her much tenderness.

As soon as she could speak she taught her the *Pater* and *Ave* and other prayers, in which the little one took a singular pleasure, finding nothing more agreeable than praying to God. From an early age it appeared she had an inclination for solitude and silence ; and consequently, when a little grown, her mother used to send her to look after the sheep and other cattle, the occupation which pleased her most, because she was there alone by herself, far from the noise of the house, and had leisure to repeat her chaplet and other prayers, in which she spent the greater part of the day, hid away in some corner of a hedge, while her companions were engaged in playing and amusing themselves. From this time Our Lord commenced to draw her to himself by much

tenderness and sweetness, which he communicated to her in her little devotions.

One day when hid away as usual to say her prayers she found near her a cross to which was attached a crucifix by a little cord. Wondering who could have put it there she took it, kissed it, caressed it, and watered it with her tears, in great tenderness. At the height of her devotion the Devil, who already foresaw what was to happen, put into her mind that she ought not to do this, but on the contrary she ought to cast the crucifix to the ground, trample it under her feet and insult it. At the same time it seemed to her that some one tried to tear it from her hands, but she held firm and did not let go. Though these were only thoughts and suggestions without effect, she yet was so troubled at them, that she was beside herself, thinking she had committed a great sin, and she could find no rest until she had confessed. Although her Confessor assured her there had been no offence, for a long time after she could never think of it without shedding an abundance of tears.

Our Lord made use of this little circumstance, which was in reality nothing, to communicate to her great good ; for henceforth he imprinted on her heart a great tenderness of love and compassion for the tortures he had suffered on the

Cross, although she knew none in particular except the five wounds of the feet, hands, and side, which she henceforth every day devoutly saluted with five *Paters* and five *Aves*. One day conversing with her on the subject I asked who had told her that Our Lord had received five wounds. She answered me that she had noticed them on this little crucifix ; and we may believe that this did not happen by chance, but by a secret disposition of Divine Providence, who willed by such feeble commencements to open an entrance for that great and burning love which afterwards blazed up in the heart of his faithful servant on contemplation of her Saviour's sufferings.

When she was old enough for her first Communion she made every possible preparation for it, and longed for the day when she was to receive this great blessing. From the first time she received it, she found herself so smitten with love and devotion to the holy Sacrament that she would have wished to approach it every day, had it been in her power. But as in the country frequent Communions are not usual, she found herself unable to give effect to her desire. The older she grew the more this desire increased, so that she watched for opportunities to satisfy it. Whenever there was a Communion she was

one of the number ; and when it did not take place she used to ask some priest to give her the holy Communion where she would not be noticed. Indeed, there were some who of their own motion, or rather from that of God, invited her to it.

Among the graces which God bestowed on her in her tender youth, one of the most important from the effects it produced, was the giving her a clear knowledge of the sufferings of Souls in Purgatory. This knowledge was vividly impressed on her mind, without her knowing by whom, nor how : but she felt a great compassion for these poor Souls and a very great desire to be able to help them. Therefore all the good works she did, or the pains she endured, were all directed to that end. If in the heats of summer while minding her sheep she was oppressed by the heat, or by the cold in winter, she rejoiced that by this means she might relieve her brothers (for thus she used to call the Souls in Purgatory). If she had to sweep, or perform the hardest work in the house, it was with the same intention. Often she exposed herself to the heat of the sun, or to that of a great fire, holding out as long as she could, in order to diminish what they endure. At her meals she deprived herself of what she liked best, often of everything, to give it in alms to the poor, with this same intention. She used

to say to herself as a stimulus to helping them, "If I saw one of my relations in a great fire from which he could not get out, and that I was able to get him out, should I not be very cruel to leave him burn there and suffer? How much more then should I assist the Souls of my own brothers, who are cruelly tormented and cannot help themselves."

This consideration and reasoning, so much beyond her age, or the instruction she could have received from men, animated her so strongly in the desire of assisting these poor Souls, that she would willingly have allowed herself to be torn in pieces for this purpose, and the compassion she then conceived for their pains lasted throughout her whole life. She recognized it as a signal benefit from the goodness of God to her, which had drawn down great blessings on her soul, and often she declared she had received great succour and assistance from God by the aid of those Souls she had succoured through her prayers; and she used to say that they were the cause of her happiness and the ground why God had so specially attracted her to his divine service. While she was so helpful to the deceased, she was not less so to the living, whom she helped and served to the utmost of her power, with great affection and charity. All in her house loved her and turned

to her in all their needs. She had a great respect for her father and mother, to whom she was always so obedient that she never caused them the smallest displeasure. They therefore loved her more than their other children.

When she was about twenty-one years of age they wished to marry her, but she would not listen to it, and seeing herself often urged and besides obliged sometimes to be amongst persons too free, and void of that reserve to her taste, she began to weary of the country and was unable to rest quietly there. Another motive which contributed further to this unrest was the desire she had of receiving the little scapulary of the Holy Virgin and assisting in the Processions and other devotions that were practised every month in the church of the Carmelites of Ploermel, which she had heard spoken of. This desire was so keenly impressed on her mind that she thought of nothing else, and all her prayers and devotions had this in view. She therefore sought every opportunity of going to dwell in the town.

CHAPTER II

AFTER she had passed the earlier years in the house of her parents and gained by her virtues the goodwill and friendship not only of her relatives, but of some other persons in the neighbourhood, who were greatly edified by her modesty and reserve, a worthy lady who had a great regard for her desired to take her into service, and to this effect asked her from her parents with great urgency. At first they would not listen to it, but afterwards seeing that this lady still insisted on having her, and besides that their daughter showed great unrest in the country, they consented, although with regret, as well at being deprived of her as for the services she rendered in the household.

God made use of this opportunity to fulfil her desire to go and live in the town, where her mistress immediately took her. While there, at first she found herself very well off, apparently delivered from a great burden, in being no longer obliged on Festivals and Sundays to take part in dances and assemblies which are usual in the country, where sometimes her companions took

her as if by force. For always she had a great aversion to them. Besides, she had the means of often attending Mass and Preachings, and took a great delight in hearing the word of God, to which she was most attentive.

On the other hand her mistress was so satisfied with her and her services that she cherished and loved her as her own daughter and gave her every comfort possible, never finding fault, except for the one thing that she worked too hard. Indeed, she was unwearied at work, as she had a large body, healthy, strong, and robust, with an active mind, and did as much work as two.

It seemed that, things being thus, nothing would have been able to make her desire to leave a place where she had everything to her heart's content; nevertheless, she was not long there before all this good treatment became matter of disgust. Weariness and sadness seized upon her so powerfully that she knew not what to do; everything became a source of pain. The more she was cherished, caressed, and well treated, the more she found discontent within herself, without knowing any reason for it, except that everything was to her disagreeable and insupportable.

In these circumstances her father died, and her mistress allowed her to go for a few days to con-

sole her mother and settle matters, enjoining her to return as soon as possible, for she so loved her that she could not get on without her. She returned therefore, but with great trouble and difficulty ; however, as she had commenced her second year of service she did what she could to finish it, after which she asked for her discharge, that she might return into the country. Her mistress, unwilling to lose such a good and faithful servant, did all she could to keep her, offering an increase of wages and to relieve her of part of the work of the house if she would remain. But she could not make up her mind to it, although according to reason and her feelings she would have wished to do so. An interior influence that she did not understand drew her elsewhere, and so she left her good mistress and returned to her relatives, who were very glad to see her again, while she was still more so at having left the town, thinking she had left there her distress and oppression of mind.

She was not a month in the country when she changed her opinion. For many reasons it became insupportable to her, besides the interior oppression which increased every day ; for when there, her relatives urged her again with importunity to marriage. Moreover, she was compelled often to see much licentiousness among

young people, who had no respect for decency of life. This she could not endure, and, moreover, she had not the advantage of hearing holy Mass or of Communicating as often as she used to do in the town; so that to avoid all these inconveniences she again obtained the permission of her relatives to return to the town, after having remained about four months in the country under a strange oppression of mind.

Immediately on her return to the town three or four persons wanted to have her in their service, for the lady she had lived with had been so satisfied that there was competition as to who should have her. She again entered a house, where she was much loved and cherished, notwithstanding which, she remained there only three weeks, when she was constrained to leave, owing to the insupportable oppression she experienced, which increased in proportion to the good treatment she received. For the more easy her body, the more her mind suffered. In less than three or four months she was in two other houses, to see if she could settle down, but she had to leave every place, however much she wished to remain. This caused her great trouble, as she did not know or penetrate yet into the designs of Divine Providence, who permitted it for her very great benefit, as she afterwards recognized.

There was among the Carmelites of Ploermel a nun who had known formerly this worthy woman, and she wished to engage her in the service of her own sister, who was married in the town—a very virtuous lady, well disposed towards the service of God, who had asked her sister to speak to that effect. This nun sent for her and invited her to enter the service of her sister, not by promising her a fine time and little work, as had been done in other houses where they wished to engage her. On the contrary, she told her frankly that she would have a great deal of work, because another servant who had been there many years was about to leave in order to become a nun, and that all the work of the household, which was large, would fall on her, but that otherwise she would have every ground for satisfaction and contentment.

This proposal, more calculated to repel than to attract, she felt herself interiorly moved and strongly urged to accept, her opinion being that God let her know that this was the place where he wished her to be. She readily agreed then, and in truth we have well seen in the course of time that it was indeed the house in which from all eternity he had destined to bestow the graces and favours which he afterwards communicated to this holy Soul—house of blessing and sancti-

fication for her, since it was there he drew her more specially to him, although from her childhood she was led to virtue. It was in this place she experienced trials and contradictions, infinitely more profitable than all the caresses she had received elsewhere, since they made her acquire the habit of the most solid virtues.

CHAPTER III

To confirm further this worthy woman in the thoughts she had had, that the will of God was for her to dwell in this house, he permitted that as soon as she entered it she found herself relieved of that oppression and trouble of mind she had hitherto suffered ; and she was so free and so happy that nothing could be more. Besides, her services and behaviour gave such satisfaction that no fault could be found. As to work, she had only to look after the children, for the project of the other servant had fallen through, and she remained in the house looking after the heavier work of the household.

God having thus disposed and ordered all things according to the designs of his eternal Providence, he commenced at the same time to put his hand to the work, and to cast the foundations of this high and grand edifice of perfection and to adorn and embellish that Temple, which his Majesty had reserved to be the throne of his love and the place of his dwelling and of his delight. For this purpose he made use of a way very common and usual in making Saints, namely,

the reading the Lives and actions of other Saints ; for the custom in this house was, that every evening after supper there was reading in the Lives of the Saints or some other spiritual book on the same subject. This worthy woman was very careful to be present, and took a singular pleasure in hearing related the virtuous and heroic actions of the Saints and admired all they had done for God. As a consequence she was filled with an ardent and strong desire to imitate them, and she wished for and sought out every opportunity. She was so preoccupied with this desire that day and night she thought of nothing else but the means of becoming like them.

But these great desires and ardours were only small steps to the transports which afterwards she experienced. As she had a taste for listening to reading and that of the evening did not fully satisfy her, she begged one of the girls of the family, who has since become a nun of the Ursulines in the same town, to read her something from time to time. This the young lady willingly did, and through the permission of God she one day read to her a book which treated of the Passion of our Lord and what he had suffered.

This was the book which completed the capture of her heart, already so well disposed thereto. It is impossible to tell the admirable effects that

this reading and knowledge operated in her soul, which was thereby so shattered and inflamed with love, that she was quite beside herself ; while at the same moment every idea of every kind whatever was so banished from her mind, that day and night there remained no other object for her but that of the sufferings of her Saviour. It caused her such grief and affliction that she faded and withered from unhappiness, as well at the extreme torments he suffered as because her sins had been the cause. For at the same time this was so visibly impressed on her mind that she knew not what to do. The ardour and distress were so great that she thought she was in a consuming fire which every day increased more and more.

While in this state, and not knowing to whom to have recourse for enlightenment in a matter so new and strange, God, who already held her for his own, provided her with a person to serve her as guide and conductor on the roads through which he willed her to pass. It was a Carmelite Father, a very holy monk, well understanding the ways of the Spirit, to whom one day by chance she went to Confession. After Confession she felt strongly inspired to open to him the whole state of her soul. She did so, relating how everything had happened and that she was at the

last point from the interior ardour she felt ; she feared that there might be some artifice of the Devil in these extraordinary effects and ardours which were experienced ; although at the bottom of her heart she was certain it proceeded from God.

This Father after having heard and closely examined her was immediately convinced that God had great designs for this Soul, without, however, declaring anything to her, or letting her know that God was the author of what was taking place in her. He merely encouraged her strongly to be faithful to God and to give herself entirely to his guidance, to avoid sin and to be faithful to follow the movements of Grace. For his part he offered to aid her in all he could, and told her to come freely to see him whenever she had need of his assistance. This she conformed to ever since, doing nothing without the advice of this good Father, as long as he was in the neighbourhood, and rendering prompt obedience to him in all things—a virtue which she has always practised towards those who have had the guidance of her soul. From that time God gave her so great a desire to allow herself to be guided by the will of another, that she has always had this sentiment in her heart, “ Provided I do not do my own will, it matters nothing to me ; let what will

happen, I shall distress myself for nothing. But, if once I follow my own will, I hold myself for lost."

Being thus provided with a guide and docility to follow his orders, and the thought of the sufferings of the Saviour continuing to fill her mind, the Incarnate Word communicated to her sometime after an interior view, by which he made known to her that it was not the Jews, nor the executioners, who were the authors of his death, but that the love alone which from all eternity he had borne to her had attached him to the Cross to deliver her from her sins. This view so penetrated her heart and caused such great love and such excessive contrition as can hardly be expressed in words. When speaking of this contrition she said, that the least sentiment she had of her sins was more than enough to deprive her of a thousand lives, if she had them, had not God by a special grace kept her. The effects indeed which it produced show how great it was.

For this view of her sins caused her so great a hatred of herself that she would have liked to cast herself into Hell to satisfy divine justice and get rid of the sin, which had caused her Saviour's death, and often when transported out of herself by the force of love and sorrow

she used to say to God, "O my Lord, give me rather death and hell than the view of your love and my sins." She would have liked then to suffer all the torments of the martyrs, and would have desired to be cut, torn, burnt, reduced to powder, to satisfy her love. When an opportunity of suffering offered she seized it with more eagerness than a famished person does food, or a heated stag plunges into the water ; for in truth she was a-hungered and a-thirst for sufferings. God on his part advancing his work gave every day new motives for her contrition ; for he so clearly represented to her mind in all minute details the torments he had endured in his Passion, and which hitherto she had been ignorant of (having only a general knowledge of his having died upon the Cross), that without any effort on her part her mind was constantly accompanying our Saviour in his torments.

At one time she saw him in the Garden of Olives sweating his precious blood and praying to his Father ; another time, taken by the Jews, bound, dragged before Caiaphas and Herod ; other times, buffeted, spit upon, torn with blows, crowned with thorns ; in short, all the pains of our Saviour, both exterior and interior, were as fully represented to her as if she saw them with her own eyes when he endured them ; and all

this with that interior voice crying aloud in the depth of her heart, "IT IS THE LOVE YOUR SAVIOUR BORE YOU WHICH CAUSED ALL THESE SUFFERINGS."

All this caused her such sorrow, and made her shed such tears, that every night she did nothing but groan and weep ; not venturing to do so by day, lest she should be observed, unless when she was alone. She shed tears, and in such abundance that her eyes were like inexhaustible springs. It was at this time God bestowed on her the gift of tears, which lasted all through her life, though from a different cause ; for during more than a year her tears were those of contrition and regret at having offended God, but afterwards they were tears of love.

To these views of the torments of our Lord was added a very special and marked one of his precious blood, for wherever she went, or whatever she did, she saw herself always as if bathed and sprinkled with this precious blood, and heard interiorly the words, "See'est thou this blood ? It was shed to make a bath to purify and cleanse thy soul." This so influenced her and threw her into such distress that she was intolerable to herself, and not without reason ; for, as she afterwards used to say, she must have been worse than the devils not to answer to such love.

All these things took place at the commence-

ment without the knowledge of any one save her Confessor ; for our Lord gave her this grace that all the favours he bestowed took effect interiorly, and if at times anything appeared outwardly, he permitted that no one paid attention, or it was attributed to some other cause. For example, her silence and great concentration and modesty were regarded as ignorance or natural stupidity ; besides, her condition as a servant made her escape notice. But the principal reason was her constant prayer to Our Lord, in which she very humbly asked him “ to keep her hid and covered under the wing of his Providence as a chicken is under that of its mother (these are her own words used in prayer), and that she might be concealed and unknown to any creature, except those who were needed to aid her to love him the more, or who would glorify his name for the graces he gave her.” This was her most usual prayer to God at the commencement, and which he granted in every particular, as well as the others he inspired her to make to him.

She did not fail to make a faithful report of her state to her Father Director, and he gave advice suitable to the disposition of her heart, without, however, assuring her that God was acting directly in her. Often she was in doubt as to the source of effects so extraordinary, and

this troubled her sometimes ; but he gave no other answer than that she should hope and trust herself to God, and that as long as her will was to serve him, his Majesty would never allow her to be deceived.

It was by a special providence of God that this worthy Father did not give her a full knowledge that all proceeded from him ; for had she known it and given herself up entirely to the sentiments she had, she would probably have died. Her nature was not yet capable of bearing such powerful efforts of grace ; but as she was never free from doubt this made her restrain herself, and the fear was the saving of her life, as she usually said in speaking of the early years, when Love made himself master of her heart. She used to thank God with great affection because by this means he had given her time to love him and serve him with more purity and perfection, for in all these excessive ardours she afterwards recognized there was a mixture of nature, and to purify her therefrom God allowed her soon after to pass through many trials and toils, as well from the devils as from other sources.

CHAPTER IV

It is usual with great Souls to suffer much from the devils, and there are few saints, I believe, who have not experienced their rage and who are not indebted to the assaults, made with a view to their destruction, but which have had an effect quite the opposite to such malice. This has been very evident in the life of the blessed woman of whom we treat, for she suffered great temptations from them, which, nevertheless, through the goodness of our Lord, were very advantageous to her. After she had spent a little more than a year in those great ardours and extreme grief for her sins, God gave power to the Devil to exercise and to torment her with various kinds of temptations, more hateful to her than death; and as it is the Devil's part to oppose and frustrate the works of God as much as he can, he directed all his assaults to ruin and destroy what God had built up in this Soul, using for the purpose temptations directly opposed to the favours communicated to her.

In the first place, instead of that strong love she had felt hitherto for our Lord and what con-

cerned his service, he impressed on her heart, as it were, a hatred and aversion to God, with a certain scorn and such a great weariness of all kinds of good works, that the least thing relating to the practice of good was intolerable to her.

Secondly, all the grief and contrition she had felt for her sins was taken away, so that at the sight of them she was as if insensible ; and much worse, for she seemed to feel a certain movement of joy at having offended God and opposed his adorable wills. From this ensued a rough combat, for seeing herself so miserable, rage and despair of salvation seized her in such a strange way, that she believed her loss as certain as if she were already in Hell ; and her despair so increased that she was continually tempted to kill herself and care no more about her damnation.

Thirdly, to counteract the praise and blessings she had so lovingly given our Lord she found herself attacked by a spirit of blasphemy so powerful that, make what efforts she would, she could not at times hinder herself from uttering some words, specially against the adorable Eucharist, and even at the very moment she was about to receive it. This was one of her most painful torments.

In the fourth place, all views and thoughts of the sufferings of Our Lord were taken away from

her mind, and there did not remain an idea any more than if she had never heard of them ; instead of which she seemed to be always in the company of devils, who incessantly urged her to give herself up to them.

But to prevent her succumbing under the heavy weight of such furious assaults, his Majesty impressed in the depth of her heart a certain fear of offending him, which though imperceptible to sense was yet powerful enough to restrain her will from ever consenting to the suggestions of the Devil ; but, except for this, she was like a person entirely abandoned and in despair, and it was out of her power to produce the smallest act that would in the least have consoled or strengthened her.

All her refuge was in her Confessor, to whom she declared all her troubles, which he himself a little before had predicted would come. He had great compassion for her, and endeavoured to console and strengthen her, but most often, in vain ; for while he spoke the Devil troubled her imagination, so that she did not hear what he was saying ; or if she heard, it had no effect in relieving her. Moreover, she felt great difficulty in doing what he enjoined on her ; yet she punctually obeyed, whatever repugnance she had to it.

During five or six months that this crisis lasted

it was impossible for her to sleep at night, owing to the terrible spectres with which the devils troubled her, taking various horrible faces of monsters, which sometimes seemed about to devour her. She was so miserable that she would have deemed it a lesser ill to be swallowed by them than to bear the pains with which her mind was agitated. Sometimes also they beat and ill-used her strangely and made her cry out aloud, at which her fellow-servant awoke, and she helped to the best of her power, without its being observed, or that any one in the house except herself had any knowledge of what was going on.

This storm was too furious to last long, and it pleased our Lord to withdraw her from it after she had been about five or six months in this state. His Majesty had compassion on her wretchedness and made shine in the depth of her heart rays of his divine Light, by which all the efforts of her enemies were dissipated. She then clearly recognized that with the aid of grace she could not only overcome all these temptations, but, further, all that hell could direct against her. One evening when she and that other maid had retired to say some prayers before going to bed, this poor woman in a moment found herself so exercised by diabolic suggestions, that it seemed

all the devils had undertaken to overthrow her utterly and to make her enter into pure despair. She lost speech and performed the acts and gestures of a true demoniac. The other maid was almost fainting at seeing her in this state and knew not what remedy to have recourse to : and indeed she was incapable of receiving any, save from him who never abandons his own in the height of their temptations.

While she was in the extremity of her troubles her companion, who was watching her, saw with her bodily eyes as it were the face of our Lord, who in a mild and loving manner drew near to his dear spouse and covered her with the mantle with which he was clothed, in sign that he took her under his holy protection. He then disappeared, and at the same time she who had seen it cried out to the other, " Courage, dear Sister, fear not, for I have just this moment seen our Lord take you under his defence and protection." As to her, she had perceived nothing ; but at the moment our Lord had bestowed this grace her heart was strengthened in such a way that she declared, in reality a great power had been poured into her soul, which had driven off the devils, so that they left her in peace, and she returned to herself.

But the devils did not allow themselves van-

quished for this stroke. They still continued their attacks as before ; but that interior power, which had been communicated to her, baffled all assaults and gave her courage in the midst of their greatest fury to say to them that, " in spite of their rage she would be Jesus Christ's and would fight under his banners as a good soldier under that of his Captain, that she would vanquish them and carry off the victory against their malice." These words were uttered with great vehemence, as if another spirit than her own had said them, and she knew well that the devils conceived great rage and indignation, and that their strength began to diminish and grow weak.

At last our Lord, willing to deliver her completely from their pursuits and to give her a sensible mark that they had abandoned this place, which his Majesty destined for his dwelling, permitted that one Sunday in Church at Vespers, a week or fortnight after she had received this grace, she was suddenly seized with a trembling and great terror. At the same time there issued from her brain a black and dense smoke, which gave off such a smell that she was near dying, and for about half an hour she was surrounded with this stink, which was so unbearable that she has since declared that the foulest stinks of this world are pleasant in comparison of that. After

lasting the time mentioned it dissipated, and then her heart was so strengthened and changed that she began to defy the Devil and to laugh at his vain efforts, saying, "Thou thoughtest, Satan, to carry off the victory over me and to ravish me from him who has won me at the price of his blood; but I laugh at thee and thy artifices and I defy thee ever to overcome me."

Then turning to her God she said with a heart full of gratitude, "O my God, you have broken my bonds; you have delivered me from the servitude of my enemies; therefore, my Love, will I serve you for ever, and will combat under your arms all the powers of hell."

Often afterwards he tried to attack her over again, and came to the assault with new powers, greater than the former; but he gained only shame and scorn, so strengthened was her heart by divine grace, which these struggles had rendered her more capable of receiving. Thus the enemy was compelled to give way and allow her to enjoy in quiet the graces and merits these battles had gained for her.

One of the principal was, that God kindled again in her heart the burning fire of his divine Love, which the wind of these temptations had, as it were, extinguished, at least as far as sentiment. He rekindled it, I say, with such impetu-

osity and vehemence that she seemed to herself to be, both as to the exterior and the interior, nothing but fire and flame ; and to this interior fire was joined an ardent desire to unite herself to God, such as no language could describe. This divine arrow, which had pierced her heart, caused her to be incessantly in pursuit of him who had discharged it. Night and day she sighed for him and groaned, without finding respite or rest in anything in the world. Her mind was so alienated and beside itself, that she was like one out of her senses, and any one seeing her would have thought her mad ; for not knowing where to catch him who had shattered her heart, she often ran from room to room thinking there to meet with him. Other times she cried after him and called him with all her strength, and love which possessed her made her utter words and do things which would have passed for extravagances and void of reason ; but not beyond the height of her love.

At night it was impossible for her to sleep : most often she could not remain in her bed, or in any single place, incessantly going from one to another. When she saw the day dawning she rejoiced, thinking it would be that one in which her desire would be satisfied : if night approached, it was her idea, that the obscurity and isolation

from creatures must enable her to find that which she ardently longed for. In short, she was so transported out of herself and so smitten with the desire of uniting herself with her Beloved, that she often told me, speaking of this time, that "if any one had assured her she would have found him in the depth of the sea, she would have eagerly cast herself into it; that if she had seen Hell opened with all its torments and had believed, she would have found in its depth him who had wounded her heart she would have hurled herself therein more quickly than the stone flies to its centre, and that all the pains of that place would have been agreeable to her, provided they aided her to enjoy her Love."

There came upon her at this time a violent desire to die. Her greatest pleasure was to think of Death as the sole means of attaining her aims. When she heard the knell for a dead person, or learned that some one had deceased, she felt a great joy and used to say to herself, "O would to God that I was in the place of this person, to see the object of my Love." The Devil, who never sleeps, and uses every opportunity to surprise the friends of God, made use of this great desire for death to tempt her to kill herself, in order the sooner to enjoy God. Once

when she was on the margin of a pond, thinking what she could do to find her only love, she heard a voice which said inside of her, "Cast thyself into this pond and death will fulfil thy desire," and at the same moment she felt as if a push to make her fall in ; but a fear of offending God restrained her, otherwise she would have cheerfully cast herself in. Wherever she was, or however engaged, she was always occupied in her interior, thinking of the Object of her Love and the means of enjoying him, and she felt such extreme pain at seeing herself so long deprived that oftentimes she said to God, "My Lord, take away my life, or tell me where I shall find you, for I cannot live without you." Other times she called him by all the names most likely to incite him to unveil himself, which love could suggest, "O my God, how infinitely amiable you must be, since not knowing you and not knowing who you are, I am dying and languishing for love of you !"

Sometimes she was seized with a holy and loving impatience, and called him cruel and pitiless to keep so long hidden. She said to him "You do indeed make yourself to be sought for, Love, and make me run after you ; but if once I am able to find you, O never, never will I let you go."

Other times she thought of herself as a poor straying sheep who had lost its shepherd and was doing all it could to return to the fold of Jesus Christ, and she said to him, "O good Jesus! you are the good shepherd who runs incessantly after sheep that flee from you; and I who so long seek you, from me you still keep fleeing. What do you want me to do, and to whom shall I have recourse? Make me to hear your voice, and bring me into your flock, and place me in your company, that I may never be separated from you." Love made her utter all these words with a tenderness and feeling that cannot be told, and made her play all sorts of parts and use all means she could think of as likely to aid her in attaining her aims.

Not only did she address our Lord, but also all the Saints male and female who were connected with his sacred Humanity. But being divinely instructed and knowing well that the most powerful means of attracting God and obliging him to unite and unveil himself to her, was the solid practice of virtues, she gave herself to it with all her strength, and never let pass an opportunity of enduring, of humiliating herself, of obeying and of conquering herself in everything, which she did not eagerly embrace. In so doing she had no other motive than to bend and incline the

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divine mercy to have pity and compassion on her poor heart ; which languished and pined away in waiting the accomplishment of her desire, that had reached such a point, she knew not which side to turn to.

CHAPTER V

AFTER this faithful Spouse had, through the ardour of her desire, knocked and beaten at the door of Divine Clemency, at last it pleased his Majesty to fulfil the promise he had made, that "whoever seeks shall find, that it shall be given to him who asks, and that it will be opened for him who knocks." So he acted in the case of this his Elected, quenching the excessive thirst that he himself had kindled in her heart.

She had been for a long time in the state just described, and as the stone, when it approaches its centre, rushes with the greater impetuosity ; so the nearer she approached the term which God had destined for manifesting himself to her, the more her ardour increased. Accordingly from the commencement of Lent until Holy Week she found herself so excessively exercised by this desire to unite herself to the object of her love, that all previously experienced was as nothing in comparison of what she then felt.

As this holy time drew near, God, willing to put the last and finishing touch to dispose her for the great graces he was preparing for her,

gave her such clear views and knowledge of her own abjectness and nothingness, that she saw, as it were, an infinite distance and strange remoteness between God and her, owing to the infinite perfections of the one and the extreme defects of the other ; and these views kept her in such abasement that she dared not lift her eyes to Heaven, nor address her prayers to God, judging herself unworthy of being heard : “ I considered myself,” she said, “ as a poor criminal who desires to enter into friendship with his Prince, and not having the boldness to present himself before him seeks intercessors in order to re-enter into favour and to bring about the peace he earnestly desires. I did exactly the same with regard to the Blessed, sometimes addressing myself to the holy Virgin, other times to the Saints, then to the Angels ; in short, to all the celestial company, supplicating them and conjuring all to be my mediators with our Lord, to obtain from his goodness the accomplishment of my desire, which the view of my nothingness and my sins in no wise diminished ; on the contrary, the more miserable I found myself, the more I wished to unite to him whom I knew to be my ALL and my only GOD.”

In this way I spent all the time of the Passion, and on Good Friday I went to the Sermon, where

I was only a quarter of an hour, hearing tell of the torments of my Saviour, when my heart was so outraged and pierced with sorrow that I was obliged to leave, lest it should break in pieces, or at least make its feeling apparent by some action. I withdrew to the house, where there was no one. I shut myself up there, and at first commenced running from place to place and crying until out of breath, like a mad person. Then throwing myself on the ground, I cried, "Mercy, Lord, Mercy!" I asked the help of all the Celestial Court and conjured all the Saints to aid me, and addressing myself to God I said to him with a fervour all a-flame, "O my Lord, and my God; the day is come on which I must be wholly yours. Purify and wash me in your precious blood; anoint my heart with the oil of your mercy. Pierce me through with the arrows of your holy Love. Make me among the number of your Disciples. Show yourself to me and unite me to you."

"In the intensity of these prayers and uttering these words which were dictated from within (for as for me I knew not what I was saying and did not understand the sense of these words, nor the mysteries they contained; but I was as if forced to utter them, which I did with such impetuosity that each word was like a sharp arrow

to pierce the heart of God). At the intensest moment, I say, of this prayer, I was in an instant carried to the highest storey of the house, without knowing how. I found myself there without thinking. When there, I threw myself on the ground, unable to keep up, such distress was I reduced to, and at the same instant God made to shine in the depth of my heart a ray of his divine light, by which he manifested himself to me and made me clearly know, that he, whom I so much had desired, entered and took complete possession of me.

“At the outset of this great favour, I found myself quite clothed in and surrounded by light, while a fear seized me, but lasting only a moment. For immediately my heart was reassured and so changed that I no longer knew myself, and I felt such a satisfaction of all desires that I knew not whether I was in Heaven or on Earth. For some time I remained motionless like a statue, unable to stir. Since then all the powers of my soul have continued so filled and satisfied, and the peace was so great in all sentiments, that I could not doubt that God had united and intimately joined me to him, as I had so ardently desired, and I believed this truth with a certainty more infallible than if I had seen it with my eyes; for the light which was then communi-

cated to me far surpassed all that sight could perceive."

But who could now declare the blessings and divine riches she then received? Certainly only the heart which felt them could speak of them. Then all her requests which so ardently she had made of God were fully granted; for in the first place, she felt so abundantly the effects of the divine Mercy that it seemed to her all her sins had been pardoned, and she never after felt their weight and heaviness as previously.

Secondly, she knew herself washed interiorly and purified in the precious blood of our Lord and anointed with the Unction of divine Grace.

In the third place, she found herself that instant despoiled and freed from all attachments, habits and inclinations to evil, and delivered from the love of all creatures.

In the fourth place, her heart was so shattered by the love of God that it was her opinion she had been pierced through and through with many arrows, and in fact from that blessed moment her heart was continually ill and sensibly wounded by love, except for the two years she endured the strange trial to be presently narrated.

Finally, for the granting her last request God unveiled and manifested himself so clearly to her, making her know that he dwelt in the centre

of her soul, that never after had she to seek him as absent or at a distance ; but she enjoyed him as present within herself, where his presence made itself so sensibly known that never after did she lose the sight, except for the time above noticed. And therefore, when afterwards she came to consider how exactly God had granted her the substance of her prayers, she melted away in gratitude and used often to say to him, " O my God, my Love, my All, how well you knew how to make me ask what you yourself wished to bestow ! for as to me, I knew not what I asked you. Blessed be your holy name for ever."

All her requests having been thus granted, and feeling herself inflamed with ardent love, as soon as she had a little recovered, she prostrated herself body and spirit at the feet of our Lord, and there in the presence of the most holy Virgin and all the Celestial Court, whom she believed most assuredly present at this spectacle of love, she vowed and concentrated herself entirely to the service of his Divine Majesty, and made the vow of perpetual chastity. This she always preserved in saintliness and angelic purity, notwithstanding the great attacks and strange accidents which afterwards opposed it.

Immediately after this blessed day, which she called " her day of blessing and conversion,"

she fell ill and continued so for five or six months with a continued fever, which proceeded from no other cause than the excess of the fire of love, that quite burned and consumed her, as well inwardly as outwardly. In a little time she became so weak and feeble as hardly to be able to support herself ; and this gave an opportunity for the opposition and trials she received soon after from the hands of her mistress. For our Lord, who in a moment had enriched her with such favours, was not willing she should in the future be deprived of a still greater and more signal grace, namely, to suffer for his love many pains and toils ; that thereby she might be made like her Beloved.

CHAPTER VI

THE fever which rapidly reduced her to great weakness was used by God to cool the esteem and friendship with which she had hitherto been regarded by her mistress, who began to be worried at seeing her constantly ill, and persuaded herself that, idleness being the cause of this unknown ailment, the only remedy was in work. Moreover, she thought that all those ardours, which externally appeared, proceeded from injudicious devotions, and that if moderation was not observed, this woman would weaken her brain and become mad. She was confirmed in this notion by a person of piety, who, having come to visit the lady, met her worthy servant, and remarked that there was something extraordinary in her mind. She asked what was the matter. The other, very obedient and ingenuous, told her simply whence it came and the ardent love she felt within. But, God, who willed to exercise her virtue, permitted that this person, though of extraordinary probity and much esteemed in the locality, attached no credence to her words and thought them the vain imaginings and fancies

of an empty head. She told her mistress that she should keep a good eye on that woman, make her work incessantly, and forbid all devotions ; otherwise in a little time she would become entirely mad, being already well on the way.

This was enough : no more was needed to confirm an idea this worthy Lady already entertained, and being wise and prudent she feared the misfortune might happen in her home. She commenced therefore to work her in every way, as I have subsequently learned from her own mouth. Many times she has jokingly said to me that if Armelle was a Saint, she had largely contributed to it, having acted towards her as a worthy and severe Mistress of Novices ; and that if the Life was written, there should be mention of her in it ; but she would have found it impossible not to treat her so. Thus we see that it was a special leading of God for the sanctification of this virtuous woman.

During the three or four years that the trial lasted her worthy mistress, being persuaded that work would help in withdrawing her from that state, greatly increased it ; for besides the former occupation of looking after the children, she imposed on her everything most fatiguing in the house-work, and directed the other servant not to spare her and to leave to her whatever was

laborious and coarse in the work ; so that from morning to night she had neither respite nor rest, and the fatigue of the work, joined with the fever, weakened her so, that often she was ready to drop from weakness and lassitude. But her mistress attributed all this to vain imaginations.

Her first work in the morning was to go to the well, which was at a distance from the town, and to carry on her head big pails of water. This caused unbearable pain to her, so that every step she made it seemed her head was being opened, and often she could hardly see her path ; but none the less she had to proceed. This was one of her severest trials. Therefore God did not allow it to last long, for her fellow-servant, who greatly pitied her sufferings, relieved her, going there secretly herself. But as to sweeping, making beds, cooking and the rest of the house-work, which was heavy, she dared not avoid that, nor ask for help, however much she felt the toil and pain. The best of it was, that whatever she did, nothing ever pleased her mistress. She always found something to censure, and seized every opportunity to find fault, without this poor maid ever saying a word, or showing in her actions any movement of impatience or vexation. This her mistress, however, did not attribute to virtue, but regarded as stupidity or natural dulness,

and therein found a new ground for further despising her.

Once when fever, added to continued work, had so prostrated her that she could not stand, she was obliged to lie down ; but it was not for long, for her mistress, after a sharp scolding, made her get up and work, reproaching her, that it was her madness and laziness made her think herself ill, in order to have her ease ; and thereupon she ordered her to carry manure on her head into the garden, which was close to the house. Her nature shuddered with horror at this command, from the fear she had of a load on her head, owing to the strange pains it occasioned ; but none the less she went without replying, any more than a poor lamb, and for two days was engaged in this work. It was the most painful she ever felt ; every time she put the load on her head it seemed to her that someone was driving into it as many thorns as there were hairs ; but thinking of the Crown of thorns of our Lord made her find her own easy and bearable.

This was not the only occasion where she was so treated. Hardly a day passed that something similar to the above did not occur. If at times she was found leaning against a bench, or in some corner of the room (which she only did at the last extremity), her mistress made her

leave the room and sent her to work, and when there was no house-work she invented some new task rather than allow a moment's rest. When she did anything not according to her taste her mistress reproached her with want of intelligence, although God had given her a natural grace of doing everything cleverly and elegantly.

At the commencement she felt these reproaches, especially when strangers were present ; for although of low condition, she had a noble and generous heart, very susceptible to shame and confusion, not from a sentiment of vanity, but through natural self-respect. God allowed that, when there was most company, it was then her mistress indulged most in these truths, as she thought them ; and at this Armelle felt a great joy in her soul, even seeking such occasions in order to mortify herself the more.

Such patience and rare virtues could come only from a heart greatly strengthened by grace, as might also be easily seen from the way she used to speak of the above.

“ It seemed to me that all I endured was nothing in comparison with the desire I had to suffer after the example of my Saviour, who continually offered himself to me as the model for my actions. For in every circumstance he

instructed me from within, exactly as a Master would have done with his Disciple : and I made myself so attentive to hear his voice, and so prompt to carry it out, that I paid no heed to what was done to me, keeping myself close and shut up within myself with my divine Love, whose presence I never lost. There I conversed with him familiarly, and I rejoiced to suffer something for his Love, supplicating him to give me in a high degree the virtue of patience, which he had practised all his life. Other times, when the trouble was greater, I swiftly fled away and hid myself in the wound of my Saviour, which was my place and house of refuge. When there retired and shut in I would have defied all Hell. Such force and courage did I receive, and all I suffered appeared to me no more than a straw beside a great fire."

A thing which much helped her was, that the young lady of whom we have spoken, who singularly loved her and greatly compassionated her on the suffering caused by her mother, used from time to time, in order to console and strengthen her, read from the "Imitation of Jesus Christ"; and whenever she opened the book, she failed not to find the chapter treating on Patience and how we ought to imitate that of the Saviour. This the worthy maid listened

to as if the book had been written only for her, and hence arose a great desire to suffer.

At last, after five or six months of fever, it pleased God to give her back good health, but not to deprive her of the merit of suffering. On the contrary, he increased it more and more, permitting, that her worthy mistress forbade her going to Mass except on Festivals and Sundays, and prohibited all practice of devotion, believing, as said before, that it tended to make her mad. But this worthy maid laughed to herself at her mistress's notion and said, "No; no, I am not mad now that I have found my divine Love, and that I love him with all my heart. It was formerly when I sought my God outside me that I was truly mad and senseless." What gave her most pain was this forbidding her to go to church, to which she nevertheless cheerfully submitted; for she regarded her mistress with no other eye than she would have Jesus Christ himself and therefore, she punctually obeyed in everything.

When she could speak to her Confessor, she declared to him with full confidence all that passed in her soul and the opportunities of suffering which God furnished; not as complaining of her mistress, but only to give him a full acquaintance with her interior. It was

in a spirit of gratitude she received all the ill-treatment inflicted on her, and when the Father once said that she could leave the place, she replied with her usual fervour, "What, my Father, would you counsel me to quit and fly the crosses God has sent me? No, no; I will never do it, if you do not absolutely command me, and though I should suffer a thousand times worse, I will not leave this house until I am put out by the shoulders." Her Confessor was fully satisfied and encouraged her to persevere.

She passed thus about four or five years in that house, of which the first year and a half were employed partly in the lively apprehensions of her Saviour with responsive feelings and deploring her sins, partly in strong and furious temptations, which the devils presented, and a part in desire and excessive thirst to unite herself to her Beloved, which at last she happily attained. The other three years rolled by in sickness, toil, fatigue, scorn, humiliation and rebuffs, described above and many others which I omit; amidst all which she persevered, always uniform and content, in the practice of a high and heroic virtue.

CHAPTER VII

THE patience which this holy woman exhibited under all the contradictions that befell her was such that no one who knew it but was full of affection to her and edified ; more particularly in the house she lived in, where she was loved by all, with the exception of her mistress ; whose husband often reproved her and said she did ill in thus treating a poor maid that performed every kind of good service and whom he pitied. But she could neither see this nor conceive it, and she was surprised how any one could love her and approve what she did ; God so permitting for the greater good of his faithful servant, whom he willed by this means to purify and refine like gold in the crucible of suffering. After God had thus tried her for the space of about three years, he permitted that towards the end of the last year her worthy mistress recognized what had been apparent to all except herself. It happened in this way, as I learned from the mouth of that lady.

One day in Summer while they were in the country her mistress took a notion to bathe, and

having taken this worthy maid with her, on the margin of the water, she perceived her in an instant quite concentrated and shut up in herself, not uttering a word. At which chiding she said to her, "Well, great stupid, what dost thou dream of now?" As if waked out of a profound sleep, she answered with great mildness and simplicity, that she was thinking of the extreme anguish and affliction which had penetrated the heart of the Son of God as he passed over the brook Cedron, which this water had put her in mind of. She answered, "Who told you that the Son of God passed over the brook Cedron?" "I do not know," said she, "but I am assured it was so"; and as she spoke these words her countenance began to flame up with great ardour and her eyes shed tears in great abundance.

This so powerfully touched the heart of her mistress, that from that time out changing her opinion, she gradually recognized that she was wrong in treating harshly so worthy a maid. Her conduct formerly unbearable appeared to her henceforth quite different; her silence, her gentleness, her patience, her submission, which she had always attributed to madness or want of intelligence, assumed other titles in her mind and were recognized as true virtues, so that

commencing to love her and to trust her she gave her full power in the household and permission to act as she thought fit, and was extremely troubled at having made her suffer so much, although it seemed that she could not have acted otherwise; and in fact it was so. She therefore often since said that God had made her blind on this matter in order to aid in the sanctification of that Soul. From that time she greatly loved her and conceived a great esteem for her virtue, and ever after continued in that sentiment.

After God had accomplished the design for which he had brought her into this house, and she had acquired strong habits of virtue from the contradictions she had there cheerfully suffered, and everything began to be favourable to her, he gave her the desire of leaving. The Devil with all his artifices had not been able to induce her at the time of her greatest persecutions to take her discharge. Now that everything smiled she did all she could to obtain it. But her mistress would not consent, and made all possible offers to induce her to remain still with her.

At this time the eldest daughter of the house married a gentleman, who ordinarily resided in the country in a house he had near Vannes.

When he wished to take his new wife there, the latter begged her mother to give her this worthy maid to take care of her house. She consented with regret to part with so faithful a servant, but the desire to gratify her daughter prevailed.

There remained only the consent of Armelle, which was obtained without difficulty, as she was very glad for many reasons, one of the principal of which was, that she saw herself by this means removed to a distance from her relatives, from her country, and her acquaintances. This she had long wished for, in order to be able to give herself more freely to the service and love of God, her only aim. Moreover, her relatives were constantly urging her to marriage, and she thought God had brought about this opportunity for her to escape their pursuits; besides, as she had a strong inclination to solitude, she persuaded herself that in the fields she would be in her element, and that nothing would hinder her being wholly God's and enjoying him at her ease. But the poor woman was much surprised to find it quite different from what she promised herself; yet all turned to her advantage, by ways far removed from her thoughts and unknown to all creatures.

CHAPTER VIII

BEFORE speaking of this trial through which God made her pass, it is well to describe her previous state, in order that turning from the one extreme to the other, we may more easily judge how rough and severe was the combat she had to endure. From that Good Friday, when our Lord communicated himself so abundantly to her, she hardly ever passed a day without enjoying his Divine Presence, which she felt sensibly and intimately in the depth of her heart. This caused so great a fire of love that often she knew not what to do to diminish its ardour. The great and vehement love kept her heart always in profound peace, and therefore she bore with sweetness and tranquillity all the vexations which befel her, and even relished them.

All the thoughts of her mind, the sentiments and actions of her will, and the aims of her heart, had no other principle, nor other end, than God, who was her Love and her Good ; so that in all her words and actions she had no design but to please God. Everything which did not tend to

that was painful and disagreeable to her. Her greatest delight was to be alone in order to converse with God, who gave her great sweetness, tenderness, and consolations. It was very rare for her to experience dryness or aridity, and if God made her taste it sometimes it was only with the tip of the lips. Quickly the milk of consolation irrigated her heart, which through this means she found free and disengaged from affection and attachment to all creatures.

But when the poor woman found herself in the place where she expected to be most free, it was there she saw herself most bound and imprisoned in a strange manner ; and where she proposed to herself to live in profound peace, it was there she encountered a terrible war, of which, if I dared, I would say God and the Devil were the authors : God to purify and sanctify her ; the Devil to destroy and ruin her entirely.

Before this trial came upon her she had passed three or four years in the quiet and delights we have mentioned. I call *delights*, the time when she felt herself well with God as to the interior, and enjoyed his sweetness and consolations ; and although she during this time suffered much from her mistress and as much as she could bear, these were but child's play and little tests that

God made of her constancy, in comparison with what afterwards happened to her.

She said herself, "When the soul believes herself well with God and experiences the effects of his grace, all that can befall her, either from the Devil or creatures, is mild and easy to bear ; but when God withdraws and leaves her to herself, it is a strange wretchedness ; particularly when she sees herself precipitated into such misfortune that she seems every moment to offend God, without being able to save herself from it. It is then truly a soul deserves compassion and that she veritably suffers." She had good ground for speaking thus, her experience rendering her wise in these matters. For she found herself gradually abandoned and deserted by God, without receiving any perceptible aid from him. All her great fervours were dissipated, and there remained with her not the least idea of ever having had them ; nor any remembrance of the graces and favours she had previously received from God. All this was so erased from her memory that for the space of two years not a single notion of it occurred to her mind. Moreover, the desire and love of virtue was so weakened that she did not seem to have ever had it.

But what is most deserving of compassion is that at the very time she found herself devoid

of the love of God, her heart was filled with an infernal fire, her mind with filthy and abominable thoughts, and the imagination occupied with the most horrible representations that Hell could suggest. I doubt not that God had given power to the devils to possess, or at least to obsess her, seeing the strange state she was reduced to for two years. I do not delay to describe it in detail, sufficient to say that everything the Devil could invent to afflict a poor Soul in these matters he practised upon her, who never gave the least voluntary consent to those infamous suggestions. It is not possible to tell the anguish and bitterness of this poor heart.

The mere idea she subsequently retained of it was enough to make the hairs of her head stand on end. Her mind was always plunged in great sadness, which made her weep abundantly. No memory of the graces and favours she had previously received remained. She only knew she had made a vow of chastity ; but how or on what occasion she had not the least notion. This remembrance increased her pain, while she had in her mind, as she thought, what was most opposed to it. During two years never did a thought, either of God, or for God, come to her, which could afford the least sensible alleviation. Her only good consisted in a fear of offending

God, which seemed graven in the very depth of her heart, and this fear never left her during the fight, and served as defence and bulwark to ward off the blows of the enemy.

In all the assaults he delivered he was unable ever to extract from her the least consent to the smallest imperfection, as she afterwards recognized. Often she has said so to me, with her eyes full of tears, quite melted and penetrated with love and gratitude to her divine Protector. However, this fear afforded her no consolation, for the more the fear of offending was imprinted on her heart, the greater was the pain she felt at seeing herself every day, as she thought, acting counter to it. At last God had reduced her to such extremity of misery that all things to increase and augment her torment were vividly represented; all that could afford the least alleviation were erased from her mind.

Besides, during these two years, she had no one to whom she could confide and declare the deplorable state she found herself in; and this was no small cross. For, as we have said, God had given her strong inclinations to allow herself to be guided by another's will and she had this truth deeply impressed on her mind, that if she acted otherwise, she would be lost. Therefore seeing herself deprived of that support under

such deplorable circumstances, she was the more confirmed in the thought of her loss, of which she felt no doubt. This did not prevent her from using every effort to find some one to whom she could open her mind ; four times she came to Vannes for the purpose, to confer with some monk ; but God did not allow her to receive any relief. She had no settled Confessor and took the first of the Parish priests that offered. Very often she could not explain her state, or if she could, they did not understand it. However, they always encouraged her to be faithful and to hope for God's help, and they advised her to communicate every week or fortnight.

It is true that, seven or eight months before emerging from this painful state, she had an opportunity of speaking to her first Director, having been sent by her mistress to Ploermel for some days. She was exceedingly glad of the circumstance, and when she reached the town she went at once to see him and told him the miserable state to which she was reduced, and her desire to remain near him, and not to return to the place where she was deprived of assistance in her pressing needs. She begged him with tears to allow her to remain.

But this worthy Father, being enlightened by a special light, was in no way moved ; on the

contrary, penetrating the secret designs of divine Providence for the guidance of this Soul, he gave her an express command in the name of our Lord, to return as soon as her business was finished, and to encourage her he said, in a spirit of prophecy, these words, "Go boldly, my Daughter ; and do not fear that God is abandoning you. No ; he will never do it ; and in whatever wretchedness you may find yourself, he will still assist you ; the strain of the combat is not yet finished ; but he will carry you through it to your very great advantage." These words were so efficacious that she submitted with prompt obedience, though she felt great repugnance ; in spite of which she obeyed, since such was the will of God. Doubtless this prompt obedience helped her on the road to her complete deliverance.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN the day which God had destined for the deliverance of his faithful servant was approaching, she was so excessively tormented with that infernal and disorderly love that it was beyond bounds and restraint. She had never experienced such strange pains as those which then agitated her, so that, seeing herself reduced to despair, all hope of remedy was taken from her mind ; she no longer thought of it. Believing herself entirely abandoned of God and reprobate, she waited only for the hour when she should hear the sentence of her condemnation pronounced. But God had quite other designs. He permitted the Devil to use his interval, and to this effect that enemy one day delivered such a rough assault that she knew not what to do or where to turn.

It seemed to her that all the devils must carry her off, and the fire of unchaste love kindled so strongly that, not knowing where to cast herself, she left the house and went into the middle of a great plain to weep and lament her misfortune, without being heard or perceived by anyone.

Here are her own words : “ When there, I cast myself on the ground quite in despair ; and transported out of myself, I began to groan and lament my wretchedness in these terms. ‘ Alas, miserable unfortunate that I am ! Why was I born, to see myself reduced to such a great unhappiness ? Was it necessary for me to leave my relatives and friends to come to see myself burning and consumed with an infernal fire ? Must my heart which is made only for God have love only for the creature, and that, which I have always so dreaded, befall me in such strange fashion ? My God, take me from this world that I may no longer offend you ! ’ Being in the depth of despair and of my complaints God in an instant changed my heart, so that from an extremity of pains I found myself in an extremity of joy and of contentment, without knowing how or by what means.

“ This was effected by such a marvellous exercise of God’s power that one might attribute it to a miracle, greater, it seems to me, than if God had resuscitated my body from death to life ; there took place so sudden and so great a change that it cannot be described. In the moment I found myself free and disengaged from everything ; and it seemed that a heavy and

terrible load had been removed from off my heart, and that the chains, which hitherto had held me in such captivity, were entirely snapped and broken for ever. Interiorly I found myself in such liberty that I did not know myself. In that instant I was shown the cares and kindnesses God had bestowed on me during my misery ; but with such distinctness and clearness that I was ready to die of love and gratitude, and every time I think of this I know not which is the greater miracle, whether my deliverance, or the being able to support without dying the excess of love my heart felt at that sight. It was enough to have deprived me of life had not God preserved me. I remained so weak for near an hour I was without power to move or even to breathe, stretched out as if dead. Through the mercy of God I was so to all creatures, to live no longer but to him, who henceforth took such a possession of my soul, that never since has he abandoned or deserted me for a single moment."

When she had a little recovered, it is impossible to tell the thanks she gave our Lord. She melted in tears, but they were tears of love and sweetness, and the peace she felt was so great that it far surpassed all the troubles she had previously experienced ; and she found

herself enriched with gifts and graces from our Lord which cannot be declared. Among others God gave her so living a *faith* and such firm *trust* in his goodness, such ardent *charity*, that, it seemed to her, nothing in the world could separate her from her God; and never after could the Devil, world, or flesh, disturb her in the slightest in his service.

There was further given such an *empire* over herself that it seemed all passions had been annihilated, particularly that of love. Never after did she feel the least spark of affection for any creature, save so far as God ordained it. On this point she used to say at times, that our Lord had healed her by the strangest remedy—the very sentiment of disorderly love of the creature; and that God had given her the greatest good she could have wished, through the greatest evil she could have dreaded; and had made use of filth to purify her, as in the case of the blind man in the Gospel, where he used mud to give him light.

After she had been about two hours giving praise to our Lord, blessing him and thanking him for all his mercies, calling upon the Holy Virgin, all the Saints of Paradise and all

creatures, to aid her in praising him for all his goodness, and all the graces and favours he had just bestowed on her, she returned to the house, but very different from what she was when she left it.

CHAPTER X

ABOUT this time there arrived at Vannes a Father of the Company of Jesus, well-known and esteemed by the father of the young lady with whom this worthy servant lived. On hearing of his arrival the lady was advised by her father to take this Father as her Confessor, and he gave her a great account of his virtue and merits. Armelle, hearing this discourse, determined to apply to him and to open out to him fully the state of her soul. But she did not dare of her own accord to present herself to him, and knew not how to find an opportunity of speaking. Having affectionately recommended the matter to God, praying, if it was his will, that he would himself furnish the means of attaining her end, she went to Vannes to the Jesuit College. Meeting at once the gate-keeper with whom she had some acquaintance, she asked him if some Father would be willing to hear her confession. This worthy Friar showed her a confessional, and said, "Go to that Father ; you will certainly find there the person you are looking for." He, however, knew nothing of her design.

In truth he made no mistake ; the Father to whom he directed her was the same of whom she had heard speak. She went to him and confessed, receiving much consolation, without however daring to open herself for this time ; but, on the second occasion when she returned to confess, she asked him if he would allow her to open freely the state of her soul. The Father let her know he was quite willing, and appointed a day so as to do it more conveniently. On her side she did not fail to keep the appointment, when she spoke to him and fully related her dispositions both past and present ; but with such clearness, humility, discretion, and prudence, that this Father was quite charmed to hear a poor village girl speak thus. He was astonished to see the treasures of Grace and virtue shut up under that simple exterior, and from that time he knew the high designs God had for this maid, and felt a strong desire to aid her in removing and destroying every hindrance to divine Love which he could observe in her heart.

For this purpose he offered himself entirely to her, to assist her in all her necessities, and enjoined her to have recourse to him with full confidence and at any hour, assuring her he would always be ready to aid her to the utmost of his power. This he henceforth did not fail to do,

under all circumstances. To begin, he wished to know if there was not in her soul some imperfection, some attachment, some defeat, some movement of selfhood, that he might direct there his care and watchfulness, in order to uproot and entirely remove all that was opposed to God ; for the general conducting of this Father tended always to an entire destruction and subjection of the passions, that the soul might be left free for the operations God wished to effect in her.

One cannot express the joy and consolation the worthy woman received from having met this Father, so full of zeal and charity for her advancement : and on her side she promised courageously to follow all his orders, entreating with hot tears that he would not spare her in anything he should see necessary, that God might be absolutely Master of her heart, that he should not regard her life, health, ease, honour, satisfaction, or anything whatever. She said this with such ardour and vehemence that she seemed beside herself.

From the time she placed herself in his hands, she was always so submissive and obedient, that never did she depart one iota from whatever he prescribed, and she would not have been willing to do the least thing without his permission.

Although some years afterwards, by the advice of this Father, she communicated with some others of the same Company, who much aided her, she nevertheless always continued, as far as she could, to confess ordinarily to him, recognising that she was indebted to him for the great help he gave her at the commencement, and the care he always took of her.

The acquaintance with this Father was extremely useful to her, not only for the care he took to despoil her of the smallest imperfection, and to make her practise the most solid virtues, but for the assurance he gave her, that all, which had passed and was passing in her, was from God, and that they were the effects and certain marks of the great love which he bore her ; as before said, she always had been under some sort of fear lest the Devil had insinuated himself among so many extraordinary things which took place in her ; and that Carmelite, her first Director, who had much assisted her, gave her no assurance to the contrary. But the present one made her clearly see that all proceeded from the goodness of our Lord towards her ; even the miserable state in which she had spent her two years was an effect of his mercy, thereby purifying her and rendering her capable of his gifts. From the time her fears were removed,

one cannot describe how the ardour of her love to God was increased. Therefore she used commonly to say these words to our Lord, "O my Love and my All ! it seems that nothing is to deprive me of life but your Love alone and the knowledge of the goods I have received from your bounty."

CHAPTER XI

A LITTLE time after this holy woman had been thus withdrawn from the miserable servitude, wherein we have seen her, divine Love through the favour of God seized powerfully upon her heart in the following manner. One day considering the love God had exhibited to her on so many occasions, and desiring to respond to such an ardent Love, she felt herself on fire and quite moved within, and commenced in great fervour to ask our Lord that he would shatter and wound her heart with his divine Love. In the height of her prayer she perceived her heart sensibly transpierced, as if split and pierced from every side by arrows, but with a pain so great and excessive that she knew not what to do ; and from that time, during many years, she was not a moment without feeling a keen and strong pain in the heart, at one time, in one fashion, at another, in another, according to the disposal of God.

But for the first two years after this grace, the pain she felt was quick and ardent, of a force and vehemence so great that she seemed to have a

fire within which was destroying and entirely consuming her. So that she was compelled to do extraordinary things, like a mad person. Though externally she appeared to suffer much, yet within herself she enjoyed so profound a peace, and her consolation was so great that she seemed to have all the joys of Paradise enclosed in her heart.

During these two years she shed abundance of tears: one saw her continually with tears in her eyes. She used often to say to her Confessor, when he was astonished at seeing her weep so, "My Father, though I should shed as many tears as there are drops of water in the sea, my love and gratitude for the goodness of our Lord would not be yet satisfied." What is worthy of note is, that, notwithstanding such continual weeping, she never felt any pain in the head. It was always the heart which was affected and whence originated the extraordinary effects apparent in her.

That fire which had been kindled in her heart extended itself, sometime after, throughout her whole body, so that one could not touch it without perceiving an extreme warmth. This caused a strong fever, which lasted for eight months, during which she was almost always in bed, her weakness being so great she could not stand.

It was then God made known the treasures of graces and virtues he had enclosed in this blessed soul. One cannot tell how she suffered, nor the joy and content with which she bore the pains, the scorn, the desertion and the neglect of the servants. Often she passed whole days in the height of her illness without being assisted or tended by any of them. But on the other hand, her divine Spouse did not forget her ; the more abandoned by creatures the more was she caressed by him, which made her ardently wish a still greater neglect, in order that being deserted and deprived of all assistance, she might put all her trust in him alone.

But God, who never abandons his own, and who takes the more care of them in proportion as they abandon themselves, did not fail to succour his faithful servant through means of her Confessor, who, knowing of her great sufferings, and the need of treatment, more easily procurable in the town than in the country, induced her mistress to have her brought to the house of a virtuous widow for treatment. There he took great care of her and called in Physicians who prescribed for her ; but the illness being beyond their scope, the remedies were without effect.

Her Director made her known to two other

Fathers of the same Company, one of whom was Father Jean Rigoleuc, whose memory is held in reverence by all who knew him ; the other, Father Huby—two persons very zealous for the glory of God and the perfection of souls and very enlightened in the conducting of spiritual persons. One cannot tell the cares and attention these Fathers bestowed on her and the love they bore her, seeing in her the true effects of a sincere and perfect love to God. They found particular consolation in talking with her, for all the discourses were so many sparks of the sacred fire which burnt her heart, and she had no greater pleasure on her part than in simply declaring to them all God was operating in her. This she did in terms so humble, so burning, so holy, that it was quite apparent God was speaking in her rather than she herself.

It was a wonderful thing to see and hear this blessed creature, for all her discourse was only of God and of his divine Love. She resembled a Phoenix expiring on his pyre, or better, a soul truly seraphic, which had neither life nor movement save to love and to die in loving. These Fathers endeavoured to moderate a little this great ardour, advising her not to allow herself to be carried away to the great excesses she felt ; but it was not in her power to resist, for it seemed

she must die if she did not thus love. She told them that love alone was the cause of her life, as well as of her illness, and that as well the little strength she had proceeded from her love, as her illness.

CHAPTER XII

SHE passed thus eight months, always in bed, and with a fever which gave her no respite, so that her Confessor, seeing her illness continue, thought right to cause her to return to the country, hoping the change of air might give some relief. Accordingly, after being there some time, she began to improve, and sometimes got up, until she found sufficient strength to occupy herself in house-work; for as she has told me herself, love so transported her then, that as soon as she had the least good health, she worked indefatigably, and would have liked to do by herself the whole work of the house, urged to it by her interior instinct. Thus she passed the three or four years after being delivered from the state of temptations of which we have spoken, both before and after that fever of eight months.

At this time it happened that we needed a Sister lodge-keeper, having only one, who was insufficient for the services of the House; and we turned to the Confessor of this worthy maid to have one from his hand, as we had great con-

fidence in the Father. On his part, having great affection for our Community, he thought he could not better satisfy us than in giving us this virtuous woman. It was easy to find an opportunity for taking her away from the large household where she was, because he saw that her continual occupations were a great obstacle to her recovering her strength and former health. For a long time he had been looking out for an opportunity of procuring her some relief. God gave him one quite suitable in this circumstance, to our great satisfaction ; for we had heard much of the virtue of this worthy woman, and were very glad to have her in our House. But her master and mistress would not consent. They exceedingly felt her leaving, and loudly complained to the Father, and showed their resentment the whole time of her absence. As to the worthy Armelle, she had no difficulty in doing what was commanded her, and thus she left the place where she had sustained such rude combats and where God had loaded her with such graces.

While in our House, she began gradually to recover strength, not that she attained perfect health, but she was much better than she had been for a long time. We had a singular friendship for her, and we endeavoured to give her

every possible relief, not allowing her to work at anything which could affect her health. Besides, she was with a worthy woman who had long been in the service of our Community as lodge-keeper, and who tenderly loved her and would not allow her to suffer the least inconvenience, preferring to go all our messages herself rather than let her do any work which might fatigue her too much. Thus she led an easy life. She behaved with such virtue, silence, modesty and submission that all the nuns who had business with her were extremely edified.

Many often asked permission to go and talk with her, and it was their great pleasure to hear her talk of God and his holy Love, particularly on the days she had communicated. One seemed to see and hear a second St Catherine of Sienna, or of Genoa, so ardent and full of fire was her discourse ; but to enjoy it one needed to proceed cautiously and oblige her to speak as if without thinking ; otherwise she never would have done it. Her humility and respect for the nuns was so great that she was always silent in their presence. When, however, Love carried her away, or she was led to treat on this subject, then she said marvels, and it was clearly the heart was speaking through the mouth.

She spent a year and a half in this state, very happy, and recovered her health to a great degree. It seemed this was God's purpose in bringing her. Then she commenced to hold in horror and disgust all the ease and convenience she here received, her interior instinct having always inclined her to what was hard and displeasing to nature. The more she was loved and cherished, the more her pain. It was intolerable to her spirit to see herself happy and at ease, though nature greatly enjoyed this state ; for to see that she suffered nothing was to her a great affliction.

This caused her to desire ardently to return to her former place ; but to speak of it was out of the question, and she saw no prospect of carrying out the design. Neither her Confessor nor the nuns would ever have consented. So far from it, they wished to receive her as a Sister after she had served some years. With this object they made her enter the enclosure of our House, that she might help in the house-keeping for the Boarders.

She was employed in serving the Boarders, of which she acquitted herself with so much gentleness and care, that all the little girls loved her and had such trust in her that she was their refuge ; and they bore her such respect, though

a servant, that they feared more to displease her than their mistresses. Her presence alone, and the modesty which appeared in her countenance, was more than enough to keep them to their duty.

She was careful that nothing should be wanting in their service, and she did everything with such order and tranquillity, that one would not think she had anything to do. Her devotions were so regulated that they offered no obstacle to the discharge of her work. Often when she was in the middle of her work there came upon her such violent assaults of the divine Love that she knew not what to do ; yet she continued, and God provided relief. I was then engaged in the instruction of the Boarders, and as soon as I perceived her disposition, I used to send her to rest quietly in some retired place. This was the greatest relief one could offer her, and as soon as there was anything for her to do, immediately she returned to her work as if nothing had happened.

During the whole time she remained in our House never did anyone observe in her a word or action showing the least defect ; on the contrary, genuine and solid virtues were there so evident that they gained the love and esteem of all who knew her ; which secured her against

any trouble or contrariety on their part. But this state was too soft for her ; God was not willing she should long enjoy it ; therefore he soon withdrew her, using the means to be told in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XIII

WE have already remarked, that for some time back this maid felt herself troubled and straitened notwithstanding the rest and contentment she received in our House, being conscious of a certain movement that made her know it was not the place God wished her to be in. None the less, she used every effort to free herself from this thought, being persuaded that nowhere could she be better off than in this House, where the examples of virtue were constantly before her. Besides, the affection we had for her and the good will she recognized in our Mothers to keep her for the remainder of her days, in addition to the wish of her Confessor that she should remain there—all these reasons were powerful motives to induce her to remain in a place every way so advantageous.

But God, who does not wish that Souls he desires to be wholly his, should regard their own interest in opposition to his will, finally made her see clearly that it was his will she should leave this House, where according to all appearance she could want for nothing, and where her

inclinations had received much satisfaction. For this purpose then he allowed her to commence to feel in a marked manner the vivacity of her passions, which hitherto had been as if entirely deadened ; moreover, nature was much more than ordinarily disposed to gratify its appetites, and although she did not indulge, but on the contrary nobly repulsed them ; nevertheless, she was troubled to find herself engaged with an enemy, who long before had laid down his arms and appeared conquered.

But what astonished her most was, that she recognized a change in her interior state ; for that great and continued familiarity, which she had always enjoyed with our Lord, and the extreme love that possessed her began to grow dull ; not that she for this failed in being as faithful as before ; but there was more of fear and restraint, and a certain contraction of the heart she had not been in the habit of feeling. This made her begin to think seriously of the means of obeying the movements she had up to then concealed.

And what urged her still more to this, was an occurrence which happened a short time before leaving. One night, being between awake and asleep, she seemed to be on the edge of a precipice, over which she was just about to fall ; and being

greatly alarmed and in trouble, not knowing how to save herself, two persons clothed in black presented themselves to her, who gave her their hands and drew her back from it. On this she awoke, her mind full of fear and of confidence at the same time. It was beyond her power to drive away the idea of this dream, whatever her efforts, although she did not understand what it pointed to.

But she was not long before she learned : I think it was next day, or certainly a few days after, a monk of the order of St Dominic, a near relative, came to see her, and severely reprimanded her for having left her first dwelling, saying among other things these words, which touched her keenly : " Is it thus," said he, " that you love the Cross and suffering ? You fly them to come and seek your ease in a place where nothing vexes you. What will you answer our Lord when he will reproach you, that, in spite of the movements he gives you for a life of greater suffering and contempt, you still persist in following your human, natural reasonings ? " Then, continuing his discourse, he added : " I tell you in the name of God that you are here against his will, and that he calls you to the Cross, not to rest."

These last words made a strange impression

on her mind, which was increased by a circumstance, worthy of remark, namely, that she had not in any way made known to this worthy Father the state of her soul, nor said the least word that could lead him to make these conjectures ; on the contrary, although he declared so openly what was passing in her on the subject of her leaving, she gave him no information as to her movements thereto ; only she was much moved and began to weep. He continued strongly urging her to leave, for no other reason than that he was incited thereto by a secret guidance of Divine Providence, who made use of him to announce his will to that Soul. Accordingly, she received his discourse in no other sense ; for it was too manifest that, without a special knowledge from God, this Father would not have spoken to her in these terms ; and it seems that he had come into the neighbourhood for this object alone, as he left immediately. Many years had passed since he had seen his worthy relative, and he left her much afflicted, resolved however to obey the will of God, so manifestly declared unto her.

She saw already one part of her dream come to pass ; those persons clothed in black who gave their hands to her being none other than this monk and Father Rigoleuc of the Company

of Jesus, whom we have already mentioned, to whom she declared fully the state of her soul. This worthy Father had been absent from the locality from the time of her entering our House, and, on his return, which was at the time her mind was agitated, both by the interior movements and the words which her relative had said to her, he found this poor woman in much trouble.

She fully declared to him how everything had passed, the unwillingness and opposition she had felt at her coming to us, the strong and violent movements towards leaving in order to be able to suffer and endure more, the dream she had had, and then the conversation with that monk ; but particularly the cravings of nature, the rebellion and agitation of the passions and the coolness she felt on the part of our Lord ;—all this, I say, she declared with great simplicity and openness to this worthy Father. He, judging from her recital, and particularly from the change in her interior state, that undoubtedly God wished her elsewhere, since he gave such clear indications, after having recommended the business to our Lord and seriously thought thereon, gave her for answer, that he gave her an order in the name of the Holy Spirit to return to her former

dwelling-place. These words were uttered with such power and authority that they made a powerful impression in her heart, receiving them as from God's own mouth. Henceforth, therefore, she thought of nothing but the means of executing them, and all her difficulties disappeared.

God, who was conducting this business, was not long in providing for her a means exactly suited ; for the lady with whom she had lived had never ceased since her departure in trying all possible means to get her back again ; but up to this, always unsuccessfully. Now being pregnant and exceedingly ill, she greatly feared some mishap in her confinement, and speaking in this sense one day to the Father, with whom she was well acquainted, she said to him, that if only she could have her Armelle near under these circumstances, it would be a great consolation to her. The Father, seizing the opportunity, told her to ask her from our Mother Superior and that he did not think she would be refused in such a just request. The lady, well pleased with the assurance, immediately went to see our Mother Superior and asked for her with such urgency that she was granted to her, with the expectation of her subsequent return.

But God disposed it quite otherwise ; for

once she had her in the house, the lady would never consent afterwards that she should leave it ; and besides, this maid urged nothing to the contrary, proofs of God's will being too evident for her to oppose it.

Her Confessor and our Mothers often begged her to return, and the love she had for the House and the desire to serve it were powerful motives to make her incline to do so ; but the will of him to whom her whole life has been submitted incomparably outweighed everything. At this time and a little before she left us, her mind was keenly impressed by the words that Jesuit Father, whom we have mentioned and of whom we will speak much in the course of this narrative, had said to her, when he left Vannes for three of four years, which was about the time this worthy woman was in our House ; this Father, I say, in whom she had perfect confidence, when bidding her adieu, said to her only these few words, which were like future presages of the state she found herself in a little after, " My Daughter," he said, " I have only one thing to recommend you, that is, that you remain firm and immovable as a rock in the midst of the sea, which, though beaten by waves and attacked by the winds, does not stir or incline to one side or the other : so when it shall happen to you to

be pushed and agitated by diverse movements, and those who conduct you have different advice for you, look at that which is most conformable to the will of God and attach yourself strongly to it, without giving yourself any trouble except to follow it, let what will happen." This was the farewell the worthy Father gave her at his departure, and it so strongly recurred to her mind in the matter of which we are speaking that it seemed to her to have been said merely to strengthen her in this conjuncture ; for previously she had not at all reflected on it, but on the present occasion it was so impressed within her, that nothing in the world could have shaken her.

In fact, it was regard to God alone, which, against the sentiments of those who wished her well and her own natural instincts, enabled her to take the step ; for with exception of those two Fathers, her relative, the Dominican and Father Rigoleuc, all who knew it were opposed to her leaving us : those two, as she had seen in her dream, lent her the hand to withdraw her from a place which could not be hurtful, save because God wanted her elsewhere ; for otherwise it would have been to her a Paradise of delight. But as the perfection of exalted Souls, such as hers, consists only in the perfect

accomplishment of the will of God, it is a martyrdom to them in the slightest degree to fall short, and they cannot be at rest until they entirely give themselves up to it.

The love she always preserved and the esteem she had for this place were proofs sufficient to let us judge the motive of her leaving, which was solely as we have already stated. She left it as to her corporal presence, but her heart was bound by strong and holy bonds. It was the usual place for her visits, and here she came from time to time to give outlet to her flames and fan that divine fire which devoured her entrails, in the intimate conversation she used to hold with some of this House.

All our nuns also on their side preserved a great love for her, owing to the esteem they had for her virtue, and all deemed themselves happy to have a share in her prayers : many with great confidence recommended to her what they wished to obtain from our Lord, and ordinarily not without success. Not only did she pray for our nuns individually but also for the entire Community, and often through a spirit of gratitude she used to say, she would never in this world or the other forget the blessings she had received here ; sometimes she called it her house and place of refuge ; because, said she, it is the house

of my father, God ; and children trust themselves in what belongs to their father. It was the great confidence she had in the goodness of our Lord which made her speak thus. At last, seeing that during her life she could not dwell here, she asked, with great humility, and for the love of our Lord, from our Mother Superior, that after her death she might be buried in some little corner of our chapel. This was very willingly granted by our Mother and our Community.

CHAPTER XIV

As all the life of this blessed woman was nothing else but a life of love, it is impossible to speak of any part without speaking of this same love. Therefore this and the following chapters will be almost full of it, certain though we are that all we shall say, or that could be said, on the subject, will prove but as shadow to substance and be only a part of the truth. Passing on then from what has already been written and her experiences previous to the severe trial of the two years, I will particularly set out the order God observed in his subsequent leading; whence may be easily gathered the loving care his paternal goodness had to draw her to the highest stage of perfection by the road of his divine Love.

Having in the first instance, for a space of two years, left her in wretchedness and affliction and quite extraordinary privation, as well on his part as on that of all creatures, as narrated in the eighth chapter, for recompense he willed that the following three or four years should pass in a very vehement and ardent love. This

love at its commencement was mingled with so much regret and bitterness, at seeing that her heart had been occupied by any love but that for her God, that it sometimes seemed to her that it was breaking in pieces, a thing which took place not by thought or imagination ; but she actually experienced a pain more penetrating than if one had cut it in pieces. During this time she was continually moaning, and saying things so penetrating and conformable to the sentiment of her heart, that it was impossible to hear anything more touching. Her regrets were accompanied with such floods of tears that day and night her eye was scarcely ever dry.

Love and regret were then so united and mixed together, that she knew not which of the two occupied it most. And in truth it was not love alone which caused these effects, that one may properly call the effects of painful love, which she felt for about a year. Afterwards all these regrets and bitternesses were taken away from mind and heart ; she passed on to a second state that effaced from her memory the sight and idea of her abjectness, to leave her only the remembrance of the great mercies God had shown her. Thence followed a love so great, that she fell ill from it and seemed about to die, as we have already said, when she felt continu-

ally her heart inflamed, and penetrated by a sharp dart which caused desires, and gave her strength to work for God, that is beyond belief, and did not rest in mere desires, but passed on to genuine effects. Nothing appeared to her troublesome or difficult, the vehemence of this interior spirit which animated her making her devour everything, when the question was of working for God; and this was constantly occurring, for it was the motive of all her actions. She was pushed to it with such an interior impetuosity that she seemed rather to fly than to walk. All that was most onerous was what she seized upon with the greatest ardour, and never was she more satisfied, nor more happy in what she did, than when she toiled; for the more she endured, the more insatiable of troubles and suffering was she.

It was not merely in external matters that she was thus energetic and unwearied, This same love which occupied her exteriorly led her also in a different way from within; where the continual presence of God kept her in perpetual movements to testify her love to him; and this she did in a thousand ways; sometimes she adored and thanked him for his benefits, offered herself and consecrated herself to his services; sometimes she praised him and invited all

creation to bless him ; at other times she humbled herself and sunk herself in the knowledge of his greatness and her nothingness ; sometimes she was led to exalt and magnify his divine perfections ; but her most ordinary conversation was of love, and this she carried on in all imaginable ways.

There she lost herself, immersed herself and was reduced to such extremity that she almost fell into faints ; but this powerful and impetuous love came to her help and straightway strengthened her, and made her act as before with such persistence, that she has often assured me, not a moment passed during these times without her working and being active in relation to God. Even at night her rest was interrupted almost every moment by these interior vehemences, that woke her with such impetuosity, that she knew not what to do to satisfy these great transports.

All this was given to her without her procurement, or doing the least action to carry herself towards God. She did all she could to receive what was given her by his divine Majesty, who poured his graces into this blessed creature with such abundance, as she said herself, that it seemed a torrent or a deluge which engulfed her ; she was so filled that she overflowed, and

if she had not found some person to confide in, she could not have borne them. When she had no one she had recourse to the woods and to the trees, or to other creatures, relieving herself by calling upon them to bless, in their fashion, her Beloved, and speaking to them of his divine perfections, as if they were endowed with reason. After that a deluge of tears relieved her and saved the vessel of her heart from bursting under the force of that new wine, which her divine Spouse poured into it with such abundance.

It was also during this time that she seemed to be always in a hot and burning furnace, which inflamed her and utterly consumed her body and heart, and which, so to say, devoured her. "Yes," she said to her Director, "I am in a furnace, but a thousand times more glowing than any in this world, which seem to me but cold in comparison with what I feel in myself." In proof of which she added, that during the greatest heat of summer, her duty as a servant-obliging her to be generally before a great fire, she no way felt its heat, and she would not know she was near it but for seeing it with her eyes. From this one may judge of the interior ardour. When, she sometimes said to me that God herself and counsel her prayers, for more than a sometimes she prayed asked him very fervently

at the commencement, when he drew her to his divine service, that he would remove and consume in her all that was displeasing to the eyes of his adorable Majesty. "Not Lord," she used to say, "by cutting, or tearing away, or destroying, but by burning and devouring everything with the fire of your holy love." She added that she was quite powerless not to make this request, though she did not well know what she was asking : but when she had experienced its effects, she could not sufficiently thank her divine Love, and she said to me in a tone of admiration, "See, see, if he has not entirely granted me what he made me ask for with such urgency !" It was enough, no more was needed to set her entirely on fire, and deprive her of speech. Thus was she ordinarily whenever she spoke of, or remembered, the mercies of God on her behalf. She used often also say to him in loving complaint : "My Lord and my All, your love and your bounties will make me die."

God having for a long time maintained her in this state of Love, which one might designate violent, strong, energetic, unwearied love, and having by his efforts deadened and weakened the vigour of her natural forces, of which he had made much use in these violent operations of his—he made her pass into another disposition

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quite contrary to the former ; for her nature having hardly any more vigour, she fell into such weakness and languor that she could with difficulty support herself. The love she then felt was far more quick and penetrating, but being more remote from the operation of the senses, it caused her far more weakness than previously ; so that her life was only a continual languor. Love still pursuing his conquests, reduced her to such a state that she knew not what would become of her.

She pined away to see God so little loved and so little served by his creatures, and that he was so little known, and that Souls he had purchased with his precious blood, had other loves and other thoughts than for advancing the glory of her Beloved. The interests of his Majesty touched her so powerfully, that she would have despised all the torments of this world and even of Hell to maintain them. These sentiments in such a way filled her mind that nothing in the world could divert her from them. She was so consumed with this desire to glorify her God that she hardly lived ; she perpetually sought new means of increasing his glory, and this desire so gnawed her, that often she said to me, that there was no death, however cruel, that would not be more tolerable to her, than what she felt

at seeing God forgotten and despised by his creatures. Sometimes she cried out, "Oh, if at least I was in a state to make known, and to be able to declare what I feel! No heart, were it of marble, but must break and give its love to him who has so loved it."

What she desired for others she admirably practised herself, for knowing that the most noble and excellent way of glorifying God is to love him, she acquitted herself of it with all her strength, and, as already said, her natural forces being all consumed, she borrowed from love itself strength and vigour to love more; and when she found herself deprived of it, she was in such weakness that it seemed she must surely die. It was then she made these loving complaints to our Lord. "My Love and my All, I can do no more. I languish and die of love." This was what she used ordinarily say within herself at this period, and often out aloud without thinking, "No, I can do no more, I languish and die from excess of my love."

Her exterior appeared so languishing and broken down, that one would have pronounced her ill. She was so in fact; but it was of no natural illness, for her constitution was perfectly sound, and her body well knit. Her ailments were always the effects of her love, and as it

operated within, the body externally felt the effects, being during this period in an extreme weakness ; which however did not prevent her from acting and discharging all her duties, as if she had the strength of former days. Of these things I can give a true testimony as I often saw her in the house so broken down and weakened after these violent assaults of love, that I hardly thought she could move about for two days to come ; yet when the hour of work arrived, she set herself to her task with as much vigour as if nothing had occurred. I will give one example out of many that I might adduce, which deserves consideration from the loving circumstances which accompanied it.

One night while this worthy maid was in our house she was waked at midnight with great vehemence, and at the same instant a strong and violent love seized her, accompanied by a presence of God so inward and essential, if one may say so, that this poor woman knew not what to do, nor where to go. She got up and fell on her knees beside her bed, waiting for day to go before the holy Sacrament. To tell what passed within her then is beyond my power. At last when day dawned she went to the choir, thinking that there she would find some relaxation ; but it was the very opposite, for her

heart warmed up still more at approaching the source of divine fire, which was already consuming her. Compelled to leave immediately, she went to the garden and took her Rosary, hoping by repeating it to escape from that powerful operation, which put her quite beside herself. But it was impossible to say a single *Ave Maria*.

That morning I went to the garden before rousing the community. I found this poor woman, who was at the limit of her strength, and from weakness let herself fall upon me. I took her into a neighbouring room the best way I could, and began questioning her as to the cause ; but it was more than a quarter of an hour before she could answer me ; at last coming back as if from a deep, self-concentration she said three or four broken words, which enabled me to judge sufficiently the state she was in.

When she had a little more recovered herself, she told me that since midnight God had carried on in her an operation, so powerful and violent, that she knew not how it was she was not dead, such was the excessive love ; and that the little strength she previously had had been taken away from her, God having wholly absorbed and swallowed her up in himself, so that she had less vigour than one on the point of expiring.

Saying this she began to weep, and thus relieved herself a little. But seeing her extremely weakened and that she had been without rest during all the night, I had her put to bed, believing it would be long before she could get up. I told her not to trouble herself about the service for the Boarders, but to take her rest, and then I went away.

When she found herself alone she commenced making such tender and loving complaints to our Lord that I cannot express. "Alas!" said she, "my Lord and my God, what do you wish me to do in this world, since I cannot more love you? Once you gave me strength to employ in your service, and now your love has consumed it all, and the little remaining to me you now come still further to annihilate! What shall I do? You know that my life is nothing else but your love, and how can I love you without strength and without vigour? When I had strength it was all my joy and my delight to employ it for you. Ah! what can I do now when I see myself deprived of it? At least do you love yourself, O my Love, since I can no longer do it." She uttered these words with a heart so touched and so tender that it was capable of softening the hardest hearts.

I was engaged at prayers, and on my return

I was astonished to find her with the Boarders, performing her house duties as if nothing had happened, and surprised at such a sudden change I asked her the cause of it. She told me with a smile that he who had taken away her strength was all powerful to restore it, when she had need of it. From that out I was no longer astonished at seeing her in these faintings, which were so common with her that when she had no occupation, Love surprised her powerfully, and she lost all power of action ; but as soon as she had to work, she did it with as much freedom as if nothing had happened.

It seemed as if God only waited for her to be at leisure to caress her and testify to her the excess of his love. And when she was in her great transport and excess of love if the time for performing any service arrived, it was clearly put into her mind ; then she used to say with a confidence quite filial and loving, " My Lord, leave me now that I may serve you in this particular," and at the same instant (wonderful goodness of God !) he used to leave her, and she went to her work. This often happened every day, chiefly during the time she was in these loving languors, which was for about eight or nine years.

Her mind during this time was always occupied with God and in God, as in the first

four years, but in a different manner, for it was not so divided as previously. For so many different motives were not the principle, nor the matter of her love ; but God alone, and the desire of his glory, without regard to herself or her interests, which she had so utterly forgotten that they seemed to have no existence. Her interior occupation was stronger, more intimate, sweeter, more penetrating, and more continuous than previously. But as God did not will to leave her always in this disposition, having designed her for a more perfect state, his loving Providence conducted her to it by way and means which will be noticed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XV

HER Beloved was not yet satisfied with having adorned and enriched her with so many graces. He wished to confer on her one, incomparably greater ; reducing her to a state, where he alone should be the author of all her actions. To accomplish this design his divine providence made use of two means, one exterior, the other interior.

The first was, to direct her for guidance to the Father of the Company of Jesus, whom, we have already said, she no sooner saw, than she recognised by an indefinable feeling as the person who would most aid her in reaching to perfection. This Father had great love and high esteem for this Soul, whom he saw to be extraordinarily favoured by the divine Majesty, and he accordingly gave her all the time and the leisure he could afford, in order that she might freely open out her heart to him, and by this means give some refreshment to that great fire which was consuming her.

This was the only relief and the greatest service one could procure her ; for, as to guidance, he

had only to listen and approve what God was operating within herself, and which was leading her to the greatest perfection one could have desired. This Father listened to her quite at leisure, and did not urge her in one direction or the other. He neither pressed nor disquieted her in any matter : only he led her to a total and perfect surrender of herself, in order that God might dispose of her according to his adorable will ; and he endeavoured quite gently to abate gradually those great and violent excesses of love, and to prevent her from yielding to all their ardour, lest she should shorten her days and have less time and leisure for being perfected in the way of divine Love.

He also counselled her to take some little diversion, by familiar conversation on the things of God with some person in her confidence, to give a little relaxation to her mind ; or else to occupy herself quietly in something that would withdraw her from a too great attention ; but above all he urged her to act as simply as possible within herself, without reflecting much on her views or feelings. When she had unloaded her heart with her usual ardour, he used to say to her quite gently, " Ah, well ! have we not a good God, who well deserves to be loved ? But you would not believe you loved

him enough unless you told him so, over and over again, and you do not see, that he knows and recognises our most secret thoughts, without our telling him ; but your love would not be satisfied unless you gratified it in this way."

At other times, when she spoke to him, he said hardly anything and on her saying to him, "My Father, you say nothing to me," he answered, "My Daughter, when God speaks, what can one say or do, except listen in silence and calm?" But she had difficulty in understanding how a soul could remain in silence, and not testify the excess of her love. Therefore he did not press the matter, but let her act according to the movements of her spirit, contenting himself with gradually preparing her for what he foresaw God willed to operate in her.

God, on his side, led her on the same road ; for, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, her great fervours and her reiterated acts were moderated from a long time back, and her languors and faintings had brought her into a more peaceable and tranquil state, which every day increased, particularly towards the close of the ninth year of the period during which she had been in these holy languors.

For hence she passed into a new state, finding herself as if shut up and enclosed in the bosom

of divine Providence, which caused her such a great interior calm, that she was, strictly speaking, like an infant in the lap of its mother, who has no other care but to allow itself to be carried where ever she will. Exactly the same was she in relation to God, all her desires and all her aims having at this period no other object than to leave her to the mercy of divine Providence, that he might dispose of her according to his good pleasure ; whence sprung a union so sweet and so intimate with God, that she had never experienced anything like it.

It was an excellent disposition for what God was aiming at, and for which that Father prepared her, and this was the reason he strongly incited her to abandon herself to God for ever, and more, and more. Love, on its side, received such accessions, that it extended incomparably beyond her powers, so that it surmounted her, and swallowed her up entirely. In consequence, being unable to put bounds to it, or to restrain her heart, she was often obliged to throw herself on the ground or on a bed, and speaking to her heart as to a thing she had no power over, she used to say, as it were giving it up altogether, "Oh, go, love as much as you will, for I am unable to hinder or restrain you any more. You are no longer mine ; you belong to Love alone."

All this served to advance her on the road of God's designs, being much aided by another disposition, which at this time she used to feel. For after Holy Communion she no longer had those sweet and loving colloquies, nor those holy ardours, that used to kindle her ; but instead she experienced a calm and a sweet slumber in all her senses and all the interior powers, as if strictly speaking she was resting on the breast of the Son of God, like a second St John. She was obliged to rest her head, and often her whole body, on something to support it, and would thus remain for up to half an hour, unable to move or speak, unless her household duties obliged her to withdraw. In that case, she left everything to discharge them ; otherwise, she remained thus, like a person relieved and satiated, who having all that he needs has nothing else to do or ask for.

While in these dispositions, enjoying the gentle guidance of that Father, who approved strongly what was passing in her, and to whom she addressed herself in all needs, it happened that he received orders from his Provincial to go as Rector to the College at Quimper, where Father Rigoleuc already was, but who had come to Vannes some days before on business he had there. The worthy Armelle did not fail to see him and to

treat with him as with her Director, for they had both the same sentiments and the same affections for the conducting of her soul.

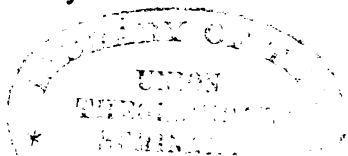
When she saw herself about to be deprived of both, and that she should remain without any aid or assistance, she was a little affected, but her feelings were soon calmed, regarding it as God's will to which she as perfectly resigned ; as indeed she showed by her answer to these worthy Fathers. They counselled her not to be troubled at their departure, that God would not fail to provide her with what was necessary, either through their writings, or some other way. She replied, " My Father, in truth I feel your absence ; but if I knew you would love God better in the town where you are going than here, I would wish you already there, though I should never again see you." This answer greatly pleased them ; showing how God's interests prevailed with her over her own.

When the day of their departure came, her Director told her to communicate that morning. During the Mass she had much felt their removal, and whatever efforts she made to drive it from her thoughts, she could not succeed, God so permitting, to dispose her for the grace he wished to bestow on her. She gently complained to him and said, " Alas, my Lord, you are depriving me of my help and leaving me alone, without anyone

to whom I can speak and declare your adorable wills ! What shall I do thus lonely, and to whom shall I have recourse ? Do you yourself be my guide and my Conductor, since you deprive me of those you had given me."

These words formed themselves in her mind ; when she received the Holy Communion and had the Host still in her mouth, our Lord said to her interiorly and intelligibly these words, " My Daughter, I deal with you as with children, who are taken from the arms of their nurses to be lodged in the house of their Father, that they may receive there a better food than they previously had : so with you, I wish to lodge you in my house." Then she said to him, " Ah ! Lord ! where is your house ? " Our Lord showing her the wound in his sacred side, made her enter thereby into his heart, telling her, this was his house. Lodged there, she found herself in an immense void and great privation, so that she did not see or recognise anything. This made her say to him, " My Lord, you said here was your house, I do not see or find anything at all." No answer was given, but she experienced a wonderful peace and repose.

After Mass the Father found this worthy maid in the church, quite absorbed in God and so loaded with the favours he had just bestowed on



her, that she knew not where she was, and was as far as possible from troubling herself at his departure. She told him shortly what had happened, which greatly consoled this Father. He charged her to declare to me all the state of her soul, (so far at least as she should judge proper) that from time to time I might communicate to him what passed in her, and thus he might render her the usual assistance. Thus he took leave of her without her almost perceiving it, her mind being in the situation just told.

When she had to do anything with attention, she seemed to herself to come out from the heart of Jesus through his sacred side as through a door, and when she had finished her work, she re-entered there as before, neither night, nor day, going out from it, save on similar occasions. There she neither did anything, nor acted in any way; will and power of doing were taken away from her. She merely enjoyed a very great peace and happiness.

She was in this state from All Saints' Day to the Day of St Thomas, without any new operation taking place in her, save what follows. One day when alone in the house, she felt herself ravished and carried away into the air, and her body raised from the ground. On perceiving this, she was alarmed and cried to our Lord, and

then she found herself as to the body in the same place as before, but as to the spirit, it was carried into another region, not of this world. It seemed to her to have absolutely quitted and abandoned the body, and to have gone to its Principle and its origin, where it enjoyed a wonderful repose without however knowing or recognizing anything distinct or particular. At the end of eight days she returned to herself, but with such aloofness from all things here below, that she seemed no longer to belong to this world ; and she could not know what she had been doing during these eight days, nor who had given movement and action to her body ; in which nothing extraordinary had been observed, performing all its duties as usual.

But after returning to herself, she found herself as if enclosed and shut up in the heart of her divine Spouse as in her father's house, according to what he himself had made known to her. Although she there enjoyed an extreme repose, she was yet a little astonished at such a great and entire cessation of all her interior operations, which she would have liked (it seems) still to employ in acts of love as was her custom. She was maintained in this silence only from the powerlessness to do otherwise, and because her central depth was fully happy and satisfied.

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At last our Lord willing to finish his work, and to draw her out of herself and all doubt, on the day of St Thomas, when she came to receive the Holy Communion, our Lord said to her with great authority and efficacy. "My Daughter, give up the place to me." to which she answered, "Yes, my Lord; I wish it; and with all my heart." At the same instant he took an entire and new possession of her, lodging himself in her heart as in his Royal Throne, and banishing and removing herself so strongly from it, that never since has she had or wished to have entry there.

She no longer regarded herself as having any right in or over herself, but as belonging entirely to her God, stripping herself of everything in him; when anything presented itself to find entrance to her heart, she used to say to herself, "If God wishes it to enter, well and good, as for me, I have nothing to do there. He is the Master of it, and has taken its keys. Nothing of Heaven or Earth, even Angels, can have entry, if he himself does not open to them."

What is remarkable is, that at the same instant in which God said to her, "Give up the place to me," there was clearly presented to her mind all that her Director had said about the way of abandonment and self-surrender in

God, and she understood and comprehended it all better than if she then heard it from his own mouth ; which hitherto she had been unable to do, namely, that in this alone was truly contained and comprehended all the perfection of a soul, and that all which had up to this taken place in her, very excellent and admirable as it was, however, was as nothing in comparison with this state, which was that his Majesty willed her henceforth to follow. Now as his words are efficient and never proceed without their effect, they operated admirably in this holy Soul ; for, from that out, she never had a doubt on the subject, nor hesitation, but remained firm and stedfast in this way, which brought with it benefits beyond description.

We must make a passing remark on the excellence of this way in which God established her ; for all the great graces he had previously bestowed served but as preparation and disposition for this, which so far surpasses them as the operations of God surpass those of the creature. For these latter, however good and excellent, are always but low and despicable in comparison with those God effects in a Soul, that by a willing and total abandonment of all things strips herself freely of all herself and her operation, to give room for that of her Beloved.

One must have the tongue and heart of the good Armelle to worthily express this.

She could speak of it as one with experience in both ways ; for we may say she seemed to have reached the highest point of perfection that a creature aided by Grace could attain through her own operations, and yet, after having been raised to this second state, she recognised much contamination and much that was human in the former, which made her say : that wherever the human is found, there is always defect and imperfection, and that the greatest obstacle Souls bring to their advancement is, that they are not willing to allow God alone to act, but always wish to have a share in what he does (although in her case she could not have done wrong in this, for as soon as God let her know what was his will, she surrendered herself to it) ; that her former mode of acting had been necessary to destroy and consume by the ardours of that great fire all that was in her unsightly to the eye of God ; but for Souls, whom from the commencement he thus draws, there is a great advantage, and that one cannot too early enter on this blessed way, which makes us die to ourselves to live only to God ; but the number of them is small, " and the reason, I think," (she added) " is, a want of confidence in the

loving guidance and Providence of God ; and secondly, the most common and ordinary, that Souls do not wish to die to themselves or to their own defects. It is certain that as soon as one has given place to the divine operation, it gradually makes known all that is displeasing in the soul even to the smallest imperfections, and there are few who have the courage to combat and destroy them to the point of fidelity which the divine light shows."

CHAPTER XVI

GOD having set up an absolute empire in the heart of his faithful Spouse in which he took his pleasure, and having removed and driven off all disorder, change, or agitation, rendered it formidable and terrible even to the demons, who dared not approach ; for it would have been to them an additional torment to approach the dwelling of God. And in fact, after this grace and this entrance on the new life, the first thing she experienced was that she saw herself lost and sunk down into God ; so that she was there as in a fortress utterly insurmountable.

From the day of St Thomas up to the Purification of the Holy Virgin, it seemed to her that God absorbed her daily more and more into himself and reduced her to nothingness. A little after, at the commencement of Lent, while this strong impression continued, she was reduced to such a great weakness that all vigour and strength failed her ; so that interiorly she was like one in the last agony expecting every moment the stroke of death ; and the whole of Lent she was in this state. The interior fire,

according to what she told me, was so keen and penetrating that what she had previously felt was ice in comparison to this.

About three weeks before the Passion all kinds of knowledge, views, and sentiments, were taken from her mind, and the only idea remaining was the single word, Love. She could utter nothing else but this, afterwards remaining silent ; except in what was strictly required for her ordinary duty, and then it was only by great efforts. During Holy Week the assaults of divine Love so redoubled that even this single word, Love, was removed from her mind, which she then found in a state of stupidity, and she was so concentrated within, that even respiration was impeded, so that she felt as if hung up in the air while stifled or strangled. At the approach of this state, which was represented to her in an instant, nature was greatly alarmed : but the mind, being strengthened by a great ardour and vehemence, got the upperhand, and she had to undergo this cruel martyrdom, which, speaking of it, she said afterwards, was more insupportable than could be imagined.

On Good Friday these attacks redoubled and increased with such violence that they caused a species of mystic and spiritual death, and her body was reduced to such extremity from noon

to about three o'clock that one would have thought her really deprived of life, like her divine Saviour, who willed thus to render her participator in his sufferings and death, in order that she might enjoy the fruits of his holy resurrection.

For on Easter Day and the following she found herself as if raised up to a new life, feeling in herself such a plenitude of God that, being no longer able to contain herself, she was as if drowned and submerged in him, feeling a new spirit animating and governing her in every thing, without any power in her to do otherwise than as she was moved by him. Her body was reduced to the state of a lifeless statue, without movement or action but what it received from another hand. Thus was she in regard to God, who moved and governed her exactly as pleased him, without resistance or opposition on her part. From that time she allowed herself always to be so led, being an instrument fit for and capable of all God willed to do in her, or through her. Her mind was deprived of action as her body, receiving simply the various operations God effected in her, in a manner quite passive and divine.

She was in this state from Easter until Ascension Sunday, without feeling anything but that plenitude and that life of God, which

so took her out of herself and everything else that no distinct idea, whether of God or of creatures, occupied her, while she was wholly lost and sunk therein, save that she felt a keen and penetrating fire, that consumed, she said, the centre and substance of the soul. It was no longer with the customary violence and excess, but with great gentleness and sweetness, which broke up and worked nature incomparably more than the violent impetuous assaults of the past. She, however, said not a word, seeing herself burned and consumed in silence after the manner of the spirit, without complaints, groans, or sighs, having already been in part consumed and deadened. However, the ardour was so strong that she almost always had fever, and she was so upset that she hardly could speak.

The Sunday between Ascension and Pentecost, she had a strong impression which made known to her, that her Love and her All would not fail to visit her on that festival. As a consequence, she had a strong movement leading her to make on his arrival a vow of perfect obedience to his divine wills, and to accomplish entirely all she should know to be to his greater glory and honour. Meanwhile her two Directors, of whom we have already spoken, came to Vannes on some business. The worthy Armelle was re-

joiced at their arrival, and did not fail to tell them all that had happened with her during their absence, particularly her present disposition, and the desire of making that vow, to which she was so strongly inclined should they deem it suitable.

These Fathers were greatly pleased at learning such happy news, but yet they did not think it proper under all the circumstances that she should make the vow so soon, and they told her that if at any time hereafter the desire continued, she should inform them, and they would send her word what she should do. On this, she replied, " My Fathers, if it is not for Pentecost I think it will be on the Day of Assumption of the Holy Virgin," as it subsequently happened : but for the moment she thought no more of the matter, though she had an invincible certainty she would make it. She was so full of this sentiment that the Holy Spirit would come into her at these Festivals that she could hardly say anything to the two Fathers save the words : " In short, he will come ; yes, my Fathers, my Love and my All will come ; " and as one of them said to her, " Have you not him already ? " " Yes, I can in no way doubt it," she said, " but it matters not, I am certain he will come again, but with more abundance of graces."

From the time this impression was given until the Monday of Pentecost she had no other thoughts, no other words, but these : and often without reflection, she used to utter these words " My Lord and my All must come ; Yes ; without doubt he will come." In a conversation of half an hour or more with her, I think she repeated to me more than thirty times these words, so powerfully graven in her spirit was this truth.

After her Directors left, the desire of making the vow still continued, without however her thinking on the subject or the means of executing it, in consequence of what they had said to her. Meantime the Festival approached, and the fire of divine love so increased its flames that she was ready and disposed to receive its Author and Principle, and found herself so seized and so bound within, that external action was difficult for her. On the Day of Pentecost she went early in the morning to Mass and received Holy Communion. At the approach of this divine fire her own kindled as usual, but not for long ; immediately she found herself free as if nothing had happened.

She went away to look after her household duties, with as much ease as another could have done, without any hindrance in her going,

coming, acting, wherever needed. This was a great effect of the goodness of God towards her, which clearly proves, what I have said elsewhere, that God seemed to watch for the times she was at leisure, to caress her and shower upon her the abundance of his holy graces. The Day of Pentecost her master entertained a great number of his relatives and others, so that the duties of the worthy Armelle were heavy, she alone having to get ready whatever was needed, and to see that everything was in good order—No small task, which required attention and freedom of mind, and this her dear Spouse gave her full and perfect.

But as soon as evening came, after she had tidied up everything, and done what was necessary in her house work, the Beloved of her heart abundantly fulfilled the promise he had given her, of coming: for in an instant he so filled her with grace and blessings, with such an infallible certainty of his divine presence, that she thought she must give up her soul, from the excess of sweetness and delight which inundated her from every side, feeling herself submerged and drowned in the indescribable and immense abyss of Love itself. She passed the whole night in these divine flames, enjoying at leisure the caresses her divine Love took pleasure in

bestowing on her in the most secret centre of the heart.

The next day she went early, as usual, to the church to hear Mass and to communicate. When she was about to receive the Host, our Lord said to her lovingly, "My daughter, see how I obey thee, and do the same for me." On which, quite ardent and inflamed with love, she answered in extreme fervour, "O, yes, my Saviour and my All, I will do it with all my heart ; and for ever, if I were permitted, I would make now the vow. But, since I have not permission for it, accept my good will. You know, O my Love, the desire I have for it, but your Love itself prevents my doing it." On finishing these words she received the Holy Communion, with what sentiments of love and joy and gratitude language cannot express.

As a consequence of this grace, that plenitude of God which previously she had experienced, increased so incomparably, that there sprung up in her a great separation of her exterior action from her interior spirit ; so that she freely avowed she knew not if it was she was acting, or not ; most often the work was done, without her knowing by whom, or if she had put a hand to it ; further her soul was reduced to such a calm and tranquillity, that it seemed nothing in the

world would have been capable of troubling her.

Moreover, since this divine fervour, her spirit was so supple to the touch of God, that she found herself as ready to follow his movements as a sensual person is to follow the inclinations of his corrupt nature. For God of his great goodness gave her in this way the grace to accomplish perfectly that which he had engaged her to with so much love. I say, engaged, for, although she had not uttered the words, God made her clearly know that he had accepted the good will as the deed, in proof of which he entirely took from her the desire to pronounce her vow in word, treating it as already made.

Nevertheless, she made known all that happened to her Father Directors, who gave her full permission to do as she was inclined. Therefore, on the Day of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin, she uttered her vow of obedience, with all the devotion and fervour and love that a soul so forestalled with blessing as hers could offer; ever since, she has observed it with very great fidelity and perfection. From that up to All Saints' Day no new operation took place in her, her spirit being constantly in a state of peaceful and profound calm which kept her concentrated within, without her being able to

act outwardly through her powers ; so utterly lost and absorbed were they. This naked and abstracted state caused some doubt as to her divine Love having left her and as if forgotten her ; for it was not usual for her to be so long without receiving assured marks of his holy presence. They were however, merely passing thoughts which had no great effect on the mind.

About the Feast of All Saints her dear Spouse, who had seemed absent since the Assumption, manifested himself to her with such abundance of love and divine joy that her heart was quite submerged in it, and in the midst of these excesses our Lord said in her inmost depth a word capable, she said, of depriving her of a thousand lives, had not his all powerful grace strengthened her to support the loving strain, " My daughter," said the divine Saviour, " You are the Daughter of Love." " Yes," she replied, " it is true, and it is through your grace and great mercy."

This favour left her so full of joy and sweetness that she was quite beside herself, and ever after to the end of her days, she was so keenly impressed thereby that she almost never lost the recollection of it ; so that she commonly spoke of herself as " The Daughter of Love," and when persons who were intimate with her wished to rejoice her, they named her, " The Daughter of

Love," to which she would reply with a feeling of gratitude and full assurance, " Yes, doubtless you have reason to call me the Daughter of Love, but all is due to grace and great mercy."

After having for some days enjoyed this sweetness and caresses, her spirit was concentrated as before in strong and simple waiting upon God, without any distinct knowledge, and nature on its side dragged towards the things suitable to it, which much distressed her ; however she took all in patience, contenting herself with keeping a firm rein lest this same nature should receive the slightest gratification ; or rather, it was God who did this in her, for as to her she was without action in anything.

On the Day of the Presentation of the Holy Virgin this worthy Soul having freedom to think of herself was seized by a filial and loving fear at the sight of what had taken place, fearing that therein might be something displeasing to the eyes of his divine Majesty, As a remedy she thought of making a confession, but her Confessor saw no necessity, since there had been no fault, and therefore she did not carry out her design.

But having received Holy Communion, she addressed herself with all confidence to her dear Spouse and said to him, " O my love and my All,

it is so long since I desire to have nothing in me which opposes the purity of my love, and yet I still suffer the importunity of my nature. My Lord, you can deliver me from it, if you will ; however, do not regard my request ; do what shall please you." She had no sooner finished these words than she received an assurance that God had heard her, and she found it very true in the sequel ; for thenceforward nature remained so subjected by this grace, that one would have judged it rather dead than mortified.

All that I have told, or at least the greatest part, took place in the year 1650, which may be called the year of grace or jubilee for her ; our Lord by his mercy having made her die in a mysterious manner to all things of this world, and to all her own operations, and willed to become himself the soul of her soul and the life of her life, if I may use the expression.

Now, in order to understand what follows, you will remark that, notwithstanding all the graces and singular favours with which our Lord had been pleased to adorn and enrich the soul of his faithful Spouse, and the perfect subjection to which he had reduced all her passions, the absolute power he had given her over devils and all their artifices, at which she laughed and made less account of them than of a fly ; the

entire death and cessation of all desires and affections where his divine service was not concerned ; —with all that, for the space of twenty-four years, he left a Philistine on her land to exercise her virtue—I mean, another nature, still drawn and inclined to seek its own little comforts and gratifications ; and although most often the spirit made it suffer a thousand ills, where it thought to delight itself, it did not yield for that, and still was trying secretly to gain something for itself. This was continued all the time of which we have spoken, without her being able to apply any remedy, which was a great exercise of patience and much opposed to the impetuous love that had animated her and would have liked by a single act to burn up and consume everything which could resist its flames ; and which in fact had destroyed everything, save this little domestic enemy, more troublesome than hurtful.

CHAPTER XVII

WE have remarked in the last Chapter that from the moment our Lord spake those loving words to the heart of his faithful Spouse, "My Daughter, give up the place to me," they operated very efficaciously through the free surrender she made of herself into the hands of her God, so that thenceforth all which passed between him and her up to her death I consider as holy and divine operations, where God was active, not the creature. For this reason I endeavoured to observe them with the utmost exactitude possible for me, in order that things so extraordinary might be known to all the world. And to keep more strictly to the order which God observed in communicating them, I will relate them straight on, and as they happened to her from time to time, without observing therein any method; to show with greater clearness the proceeding of holy love in the guidance of this beautiful Soul.

From the time our Lord had delivered her from the importunity of her natural appetites, she continued very free and exempt from them ;

so that love, peace, and interior calm, increased much in her, with such a sweet and intimate union between God and her spirit that it seemed she had become "One same thing" with him. She continually felt this actual union from the Festival of the Presentation of the holy Virgin, when this grace was given, up to the Thursday before the Carnival, when her spirit found itself quite changed and overwhelmed with very great sadness and profound grief, at seeing the goodness of God so despised and offended by his creatures ; who at that season give full liberty to all kinds of vices.

This poor woman knew not what to do to stop it. She said lovingly to our Lord, "O my Love and my All, I see all men's hearts are shut against your entrance, that you are rejected and driven away by all, and that you know not in what place to make your dwelling. I offer myself to you, that you may find rest and your retreat in me." This said, it seemed to her our Lord at the same time accepted her offer ; and, in fact, he so abundantly communicated himself to her that she could not doubt of his actual presence, for he bestowed on her such tender and loving caresses that in relating it, she said it seemed God had only her alone in this world to caress, with such excessive love did he do it. To ex-

press it simply she used this comparison, that God behaved to her like a person, who, seeking the friendship of some others, should be rejected by all, save one, and he being found faithful, should alone receive all the proofs of good will and friendship of that person. In the same way she never failed to experience these extraordinary caresses at the seasons, when men almost totally forget them, to have no other God but their sensuality.

But in the year 1651, of which we are speaking, she received greater than usual, and love being more kindled, the regret also, at so many offences being committed against that adorable Majesty, was the more keen and penetrating ; so that, to turn aside the course of so many offences and to prevent such evils, she offered herself to her divine Love, affectionately supplicating him to discharge on her all the penalties he should please in order to prevent his being further offended.

Wonderful thing ! no sooner had she made her offer to God than immediately by deed he made it apparent that it was agreeable to him ; for at the same instant she felt herself so overwhelmed with ills and pains, that there was not a part of her body which had not its own particular torment ; so that she was compelled to take to her bed from Friday to the following

Thursday, without any relaxation in the severity of her sufferings, except during the time occupied in going to a neighbouring church every morning at six o'clock to hear Mass, and receive the holy Communion ; after which she lay down unable to support herself. The first Thursday in Lent her pains redoubled in such a way in the afternoon that she thought she must die, and therefore turning lovingly to her only Love, she said to him : " My Lord, if you wish me to die continue and augment my suffering ; but if you wish me still to live, give some relaxation, for I can no longer endure." The moment she had made this prayer, she found herself completely cured, and as if nothing whatever had ailed her ; in proof of which she immediately got up and went to work at her house duties.

From this we may see how prompt our Lord was to hear the prayers of his faithful servant ; and further, it seemed that her prayers and sufferings turned aside the course of many sins and debauches, for there had not passed such a Carnival these many years back, where there was less excess and licentiousness than in this one. Everyone in the town was astonished, and they said one to another, that they did not know how it was, everybody seemed so reserved and concentrated that there were none of the

usual recreations and diversions. I doubt not that the sufferings of this servant of God were the cause ; to which it seems his goodness found pleasure in granting all that she asked ; and although this I say is merely a thought of my own, I think it nevertheless very probable, and anyone who considers the blessings which God had conferred on her will not find it difficult to believe.

About a week or a fortnight after she had recovered her health, she was suddenly seized with such an ardent desire of loving Love that she was quite dazed and lost the use of her senses, and, seeing herself unable to satisfy her desire through her great weakness, she became excessively sad. Then our Lord said in the inmost depth of her being: "I give you my Love ; Love me as much as you will." The moment she heard these words her heart was smitten and kindled in such a fire of Love, and it appeared so divine and penetrating that what she had up to this time experienced was nothing in comparison to this, and it seemed to her, as she told me, that she was only commencing to love as she ought from this moment. She was some days in this great and conscious love, which absorbed her and filled her with divine delight and from which nothing could distract her. When this powerful operation had ceased her body was so weak and

broken that with difficulty could she support herself, and so the rest of Lent passed, without however her being prevented from attending to her house duties.

The Saturday before Easter our Lord made himself felt intimately present to her soul, so that all this day she was full of a great love caused by this divine presence, and having come to see me, she said, speaking of it, "It seems my Love and my All could not wait until to-morrow to rise again and make himself felt by my heart, to which he is more present than if I saw him with the eyes coming out of the Sepulchre." And speaking to her Love she said, "O my Love, you could not wait until to-morrow so eager is your goodness to do me good." The remainder of the day and night she spent in conversing lovingly with our Lord.

Next day, Easter Day, she found her heart quite changed, experiencing a certain bitterness and vexation, which would, it seemed, incline her to disquiet. This disposition much astonished her, seeing for many years back nothing similar had occurred; particularly since the Feast of St Thomas, spoken of above. In the evening when retired to her room, she thought to herself as to the cause of this, but could settle on none, unless the permission of God to make

her know her weakness ; at which she was quite content provided his divine Majesty was not offended, for otherwise all states were indifferent to her. While occupied with these thoughts, an interior light clothed her in a moment, by which she saw clearly and distinctly what had passed in her during the day, namely the combat between the body with all that is earthly and sensual and the spirit with all the celestial.

This was represented to her, as she told me, under the appearance of two persons, one of whom with all his strength was trying to draw her upwards, and the other employed all his to draw her down. This struggle went on for about a half hour ; sometimes it seemed the body, signified by him who was drawing her down, kept firm on the earth and was not willing to be drawn upwards, and this she was made understand represented her inquietudes felt during the day : at other times, the spirit had the upper hand and drew her to itself, but gradually the body returned towards its centre quite gently ; at last, the spirit, strengthened by Grace, drew with such power that the body and it settled themselves in the same place and remained at peace. Then everything disappeared and ceased.

The effects which this produced remained

with her always, for henceforth the body and sentiments were so supple to the spirit that they no longer hindered its operations, or to speak more correctly, they no longer resisted the operation of God in this holy Soul. It is not that before this there had been other resistance than from the weakness of nature, which, not being sufficiently strong to support the simple and spiritual operations of the spirit, felt great disorders through all its members when there occurred some more extraordinary ones ; but from that time the spirit had a complete victory over the body and had, so to say, made it spiritual, so that it no longer felt anything of this ; while previously it saw itself quite softly undermined and consumed away every day without complaint or resistance.

Although we have already said that something similar had taken place when treating of the cessation of her interior operations and of the calm and silence God had established her in from the commencement of that state, where we said, she suffered divine things without resistance, there is nevertheless a great difference between the one and the other, for in the earlier, only the powers were deadened, and in the second, the body and all the sentiments were so likewise. After receiving this grace she was for

a long time apparently as if in the state of innocence, so that had she given the rein to all her natural appetites, they would have sought no other thing than God, whither they inclined of themselves, as previously they did naturally towards the things of the world.

It would be impossible to tell the treasures of graces and spiritual riches which this state brought her, or the divine calm in which she was established, being herself astonished how a human creature could bear it: often she said to me that if God had not supernaturally preserved her, it would have been impossible for her to continue in life, for this repose was so divine and so spiritual, and approached in some sort that of the Blessed, and was more capable of separating soul from body than all the tortures of the world. This great repose was caused by the subjection of the body to the spirit and the admirable union of her spirit itself with God: which was so great that one day, speaking on the subject, she said to me these words: "Though all men should employ themselves to describe the intimate union I feel with my divine Love, they could never tell the least part of it. It is so great, yes, it is so great that the Angels themselves are in wonder at it, and yet they do not know what it is. Only my God alone could tell it."

Now, as to the Angels and the Blessed, from the time she had received this last grace, our Lord made her sometimes know that she no more belonged to this world, and that Heaven was wishing for her ; and sometimes it seemed that all the Saints were inviting her to come to share the celestial dwelling, and she used to say to them, " In vain you show me your delights : I have no desire to enjoy them but when my Love wills, my Paradise is to accomplish his adorable will."

Meantime, though she was in such a perfect conformity that she would not have wished by a moment to advance or retard the hour of her decease, she no longer regarded herself as a person of this world, and often said, " I have nothing to do here below, nothing detains me but the will of my God, for on my part, I have done what he had ordained me. I am quite ready to depart when it shall please him ; for he sent me into this world only that I might love him, and through his great mercy I have so strongly loved him, that it is not possible for me to love him more in the manner of mortals. I must go to him to do it in the way of the Blessed. Other times she would say : " Between God and me there is only the fragility of this poor body, which is so undermined and consumed from

loving that it needs but a little puff of air to snap and break it up utterly."

Such was her usual language from the time God had reduced her to the state we have just described, in which she long remained, and when it pleased his Majesty to confer on her some new grace or favour, she did not for that pass from one state to a different one, but continued steady and fixed in this: and then she enjoyed more distinctly and more really the greatness of the Beloved, through very profound concentrations and very delicate touches, which he effected in the very centre of her soul, and which, owing to their being so spiritual and divine, admitted of no description. She used only to say, that a single one of those touches far surpassed all she had had up to that time.

Notwithstanding she had reached such a high degree of perfection, the Devil did not consider himself totally conquered, and at this time made a new effort to see if he could in any way trouble the peace and repose of this Soul. He therefore tried to frighten her with vain fears to withdraw her from the great calm she enjoyed, but his attempts were useless, and served only to make known to the heart of this happy woman that God had given her full power over the desires and sensualities of nature, when he had by special

grace freed her from its importunity and had moreover perfectly subjected the body to the spirit, rendering it in its way as if a participator in the qualities of this same spirit. Besides this, he wished further to make her victorious over this last enemy, who for many years had not dared to appear; which was done in the way you will now see.

One day about the Feast of the Assumption of the holy Virgin, when retired to take rest, she had a strong idea of the tender and loving caresses she used formerly to offer her Beloved, at the time it was in her power to exhibit the excess of her love, and the favours she in return used to receive from him, and the way in which she had cleared and overcome so many ambushes of her enemies, in his name and by his strength. While so thinking a gentle doze fell on her, and she saw herself shut up in a chamber while she held in her arms a little infant, that she embraced and cherished with great tenderness. In the midst of her caresses two men presented themselves with exceedingly dirty garments and horrible gestures, who wanted to outrage her, and used all their efforts to make her leave the child and look them in the face. But they could do neither the one nor the other, at which they exhibited extreme rage, particularly because she

would not condescend to lift her eyes to look at them.

After some time had thus passed, getting weary, she rose and went out of the chamber to avoid their importunities. When she went out she knew not what became of the child, but it seemed to her she had received from it such power of spirit, that she would have conquered Hell, had it presented itself. Continuing her road, she found herself in a great plain, where these two men still pursued her, playing a thousand monkey tricks round her. They even gave her blows to disquiet her if they could ; but she paid no more attention to them than if they had done nothing. At last one of them, vexed at his useless attempts, said to the other : " Let us leave her ; do we not see all our efforts are thrown away, we shall gain nothing ; it is better for us to take ourselves off." But the other, more obstinate than ever, continued still, without however having power to touch her. He tried only to make her turn back to look at him.

Seeing that he persisted, and finding herself strengthened with an extraordinary vigour, she turned towards him and, seizing him by the neck threw him on the ground, without however any emotion ; and animated by a courage quite divine, she trampled him under foot, and after

beating him soundly she threw him into some stagnant water near by. When he tried to get out of this she gave him several blows with a knife she found at hand, until he no longer appeared, and everything vanished. She immediately awoke, her heart so full of love and divine glory that it seemed to her she was already in Paradise.

Whoever will examine the thing closely will notice that all which she saw in the dream was a simple representation of what had taken place during the course of her life ; (as she many times admitted to me) for that tender love she had for the child was none other than the ardent love she always had for our Lord Jesus Christ, whose sacred Humanity she had so constantly before her at the commencement, that she almost never lost it from sight. This doubtless gave her strength easily to surmount all the snares of Satan. And when advancing on the road of perfection, she lost this sensible presence of the holy Humanity of the Son of God, he communicated to her another of his Divinity, far more spiritual and intimate, so that the Devil could approach it only at a distance, all the avenues of her heart being completely closed. As to her not looking at the face of those men, it is the genuine and faithful practice she observed all her life in regard to the

suggestions and temptations of the enemy, which she never considered to examine them, but despised all; without even consenting to hear them, her spirit being so occupied with loving that it could dwell on nothing else.

CHAPTER XVIII

AFTER this holy woman had won the signal victories described, God established her in the power and possession of his wealth, that is to say, he made known to her the great treasures of graces and divine riches she had acquired by having sustained and surmounted so many attacks for his love. She saw herself so abounding in goods and delights that she reposed therein, like one who, having toiled and sweated many years and undergone great labours, has at length acquired such riches that he sees himself no longer in need of anything, and has become so powerful that he no longer dreads the approach of any enemy.

So it was with her, and she used these terms to explain her state. "All my wealth is," she said, "God alone; and now that by his great mercy and goodness he is entirely mine, as I am entirely his, I have no need to labour to acquire new things. I have merely to repose in his goods; and as he reposes in me, so I repose in him, being entirely shut up and annihilated in him. There I no more find myself, and when I

say that *I enjoy*, that *I love*, and that *I possess*, it is not *I* who receive that ; it is his love which is my love ; his riches are my riches ; his peace is my repose ; his ways are my delights ; and so with the rest of his divine perfections. And now there remains nothing for me to desire ; for I am quite loaded with goods I have no fear of losing, for they belong purely to my Love and my All ; and on my part I no longer possess them as from my selfhood, so there is no fear of their being taken away." Such were her admirable discourses at this time, or rather those which the force and strength of her Love made her utter ; for otherwise she would have said nothing of them, but our Lord, who willed that these treasures of grace should be manifested, permitted her so to announce them in order that they should be recorded.

At this same time she happened one day, thoughtlessly, to say something amusing to divert those with whom she was ; at the same moment she was interiorly checked for it, and her Love made her know that henceforth her tongue was a blessed tongue, consecrated to his divine Majesty, and that she should have no other employment for it than that which the Blessed in Heaven have, praising him incessantly ; that her life should be pure as that of the Angels,

and her love great and burning as that of the Seraphim. And as to will and to do is the same thing with God, at the same instant she experienced the effects of his divine volitions ; particularly in the matter of Love, of which a flame so great and divine shed itself through her heart that she said : " From that time forward nothing is felt in this heart but a living and celestial flame, which never abates and which consumes without destroying me, after the manner of the Seraphim in Paradise, who are consumed by the sweet violence of their love."

Some days after she went to confession for having said that idle word, which was the greatest fault she had committed for a long time ; so pure was her heart. Her Confessor after confession said to her the same words as our Lord had said on the subject, and that her tongue should no longer be employed save in blessing and glorifying God, like the Blessed. She was greatly rejoiced and said to him, " My Father, you only confirm the truth of the lights which God has given me in this matter." Then she related to him all that had taken place ; finding therein a new cause of praise and love for her God in his great care and goodness towards her.

He gave her a further very signal proof of it on the Octave of the Nativity of the holy Virgin

in this same year 1651. One morning, while at church hearing Mass, her mind was suddenly carried away in a consideration of all the nations of the earth. She saw them, some deprived of a knowledge of the true God, which caused her extreme regret ; others, where many persons of holy life were at the price of their blood endeavouring to carry the light of Faith among these poor blind ones, and this gave her great joy ; others again in Christendom, some of whom live in obedience to the commandments of God, while some despise them and pay no attention.

All these particulars, I say, presented themselves to her mind and produced in her heart suitable effects—some of joy, others of sadness ; and she felt for all equally a very great love, which led her to recommend all alike to his divine Love, that his goodness would be pleased to confirm in good those already in it, and withdraw from evil those who were plunged therein. While she was in the intensity of her prayer, she suddenly lost all knowledge and views she had had on the subject, exactly as if a curtain had been drawn before her eyes to hinder her seeing. At the same time our Lord made himself perceived, present in the inmost depth of her soul, and in his usual way said to her, as though jealous

of the love of his Beloved, " My Daughter, love me alone." Then she answered with very great ardour, " Yes, my Love, I wish it ; Yes, I wish it, I wish it " ; and during the whole of the Mass she could not hinder herself uttering interiorly these words, " I wish it, I wish it," with a love and fire indescribable.

She went to receive the holy Communion still uttering these words, which were then changed into these terms, " At last Love is enclosed and shut up ; at last Love is shut in and enclosed." And these words stuck to her heart, which she kept uttering continually, like the preceding ones, until the close of the Mass ; then, as she was returning home, midway on her road, they ceased, and at the same instant our Lord produced an operation so sweet and loving in the inmost of her soul, that it was a wonder she did not drop to the ground. He made her then see that just as all himself, who is Love essential and infinite, was shut in and enclosed in her, so he willed to make her pass, to transform and incorporate her, into himself, and at the moment she found herself as if dead and deceased in the immense love of the Divinity.

To tell what she now experienced is impossible. She herself knew not what to say of it, unless that one could absolutely tell nothing of it. She

returned to the house, where all she could do was to throw herself on a bed, and she was for the space of three days under this wonderful operation, after which she was able to go about where necessary for external matters; but as to the spirit, it was always in the same place. And, as her life was God himself, so did she participate in her manner in the qualities of the Divinity; for since she received this favour things, which formerly had caused her joy or sadness, no longer produced their effects in the usual way; for example, before she received this grace when God was offended, it was to her insupportable, and she was so displeased that she often fell ill: on the other hand when she saw him loved and obeyed, she received inconceivable joy.

But after receiving this grace, she no longer felt things in this way; natural sentiments and the passions were entirely extinguished. She saw evil and had it in horror, feeling a total estrangement from it; but it was without sadness and without pain; so all which turned to the glory of her Beloved gave her joy, but without emotion or any demonstration—it was a joy perfect and divine, which could not receive diminution or alteration from anything here below—a joy, in short, which had its source in

the true and essential joy—that is God himself ; as regards the other passions, it was exactly the same as with these two.

The following All Saints' Day her divine Love willed to give her some knowledge of the glory and felicity which those glorious Souls enjoy in Heaven, and by a supernatural light he made her see how these Blessed Spirits never separate from Love nor the presence of their Beatific Object. As she was admiring their happiness in this, her spirit was at the same moment led to deplore the misery of those who live here below, in the continual danger and hazard of falling from Grace, however high a state of it they may possess. While these views seemed to lead her to a kind of compassion and apprehension for the loss of so many Souls, who cast themselves into sin, far from taking the trouble to withdraw themselves from it, our Lord made her know, how on his part he was quite ready to aid them to escape from such misfortune ; and she seemed to see him with infinite love offering his divine hands to all, to those in a good state, in order to maintain them therein, and to those who were not, to establish them therein ; and she saw that it was only those who gave their hands to those of this divine Saviour and who kept firmly attached to them, who could avoid the rocks

and dangers that follow us and surround us from all sides in this mortal life.

At this a very tender desire sprang up in her soul never to quit that divine hand and to follow his guidance in all things. Her divine Love gave her the assurance of this, and made her know, that for her there was nothing to dread, as his mercy would never abandon her ; and in proof of what he said, he presented his blessed hand, which she clasped and tightly grasped, joining one of hers to it. For three or four days it seemed to her that in reality she was constrained to carry her hand to her mouth, in order to kiss and adore the hand of Jesus, which was joined with hers. This was not the only favour she received.

Her dear Love, who had made her see a sample of the glory of the Blessed, willed also to make her a participator in her manner ; so that, as what she had most admired in the felicity of the Saints, was that great love and that continued vision which they have of the Divinity, and which constitutes the essence of their beatitude ; so our Lord also conferred on her this grace, by making her contemplate in herself his glory and his divine attributes, and above all, his infinite Love, with such clearness that she became quite deified and transformed into him. It seemed

to her that she had become "one same thing with him."

This made her use the following admirable and profound language, "Now, God is all, and as for me, I am no longer : I am through his mercy returned whence I had come forth. He alone lives and reigns in me, and no longer I ; for I am no longer in me, but in him ; where I no longer find myself and where I am lost. It is he alone who is alive, for I no longer see anything which is not himself." Here are word for word her very phrases that I many times heard from her own mouth ; from which we may judge to what a state this happy creature had attained.

On St Andrews' Day God, continuing still to bestow on her new favours, made her feel a love so pure, so sweet, and so divine, that it seemed to her she had never yet experienced the like ; so that she said to God, " I know not my Love and my All, why you confer on me such graces, for it appears you find every day new ways of caressing me and showing me you love me. If anyone knew what your Goodness makes me feel, he would say that you have only me to look after, and that you are idolizing your poor and mean creature." Certainly she had good reason to speak so, for in truth God bestowed on her inconceivable favours and caresses.

It seemed to her at this time that she continuously heard the voice of the Beloved saying, "Thou art no longer in the winter: the winter is passed for thee and will never return"; and this voice made itself heard in the inmost depth of her heart from St Andrews' Day until the eve of the Conception of the holy Virgin, when she found herself overwhelmed with great pains in all her limbs, which however had no influence on her spirit. A day or two previously she had had a conversation with the Rector of the College of Jesuits, with whom, since the departure of her Director, she had been in communication, and as she related to him what had taken place since her last interview, she told him among other things that she often heard these words, "There is no more winter for her, that it was already passed." On this the Father replied with a smile: "Do not imagine that, my Daughter: no, the winter is not yet passed. You are at present in the spring, and the time of flowers; but the winter will return again, and you will yet feel it."

She heard these words without paying any more attention to them than to an ordinary remark in conversation, and until the Day of the holy Virgin she retained no notion of them. On that day at three or four o'clock in the

morning she was awakened, and, smitten with a great love, she heard distinctly spoken in the inmost of her soul by our Lord. "No, my Daughter : thou art not in the time of flowers : for flowers are too inconstant : it needs but a frost or a hail shower to beat them down, or too much heat or wind to wither them. Thou art not like that ; thou art a ripe fruit. And as the ripe fruit is gathered and stored in a secret place, all thou hast done in thy life is stored in Heaven. But when the fruit has been gathered we must take care from time to time that it does not spoil ; for if once it decay, it is cast away as worthless ; so do thou be careful to remain always faithful and submissive to my wills. Do not, however, fear that thou canst ever incur the misfortune of falling, for I will preserve thee always through my mercy as a fruit I have gathered and reserved for myself alone."

These are the words our Lord said to her, which are as loving as full of instruction. Accordingly she drew from them admirable lessons as to the fidelity we owe to Grace ; and how in this world to whatever height of perfection his Grace may have elevated us, it is only on God's goodness and mercy we should ever rely. As to the vivid impressions of love

she received, they are incredible, and they influenced even her body, so that she was immediately delivered from the pains she was before suffering, and so concentrated and shut up interiorly that nothing of the exterior could be felt. Thus she continued until the Saturday before the last week in Advent. On that day, her diverse occupations required attention of mind, and therefore that powerful concentration in which love had kept her ceased, so that she was able to attend to everything necessary, without any hindrance.

In this freedom she remained until the following Tuesday, when her extraordinary business ceased. In the early morning she went to hear Mass, and when about to receive the holy Communion, our Lord showed her that she was like those prisoners who are allowed to go out occasionally to look after their business, which finished, they have to return to their former dwelling place: in exactly the same way he wished again to confine and shut her up in the prison of his Divinity. On the same instant she found herself enclosed and shut into God in a way that baffled all description. The love and ineffable sweetness, which this divine favour caused her, drew from the depth of her heart these loving words addressed to our Lord, "O

my Love, and my All! You are then the Jailor of my heart who hold it captive and prisoner!" Then she remained silent, enjoying at leisure the wonderful delights of her charming Prison.

The next day some trifling occurrence diverted her a little from this profound peace in which she was plunged, although the thing was so trifling that she hardly perceived it. This happened only to open a door for the favour which God willed to bestow on her; for, as soon as this slight movement came to attack her heart; her divine Love who reposed there, or rather who had shut her up in himself, said these words, "My Daughter, when a person is retired into his house with his intimate friend, with whom he is in familiar conversation, if any intruder comes to knock at the door, he makes no semblance of hearing him, or else sends word that he is engaged and therefore in private; so oughtest thou to do with everything which may offer itself; for thou art no longer for anything in this world but for me alone." To this she replied, "O my Love, yesterday I called you my Jailor, but to-day I will name you my Door-keeper, the Guardian of my heart and the Light of my soul; for doubtless it is you who perform all these offices on my behalf, and you enlighten

and instruct me through ways and means I should never have thought of."

It was with very good reason she spoke thus ; every day God gave her new knowledge, which so kindled the fire of divine Love in her soul that at this period she used ordinarily to say : " If there was the smallest part of me which subsisted through Self, long ago the vehemence of this Love would have destroyed it, but as I do not see it at all in me and it is all in God, from whom it goes not out to communicate itself to me (so am I lost and submerged in him) ; I subsist therefore and carry on my life through the strength he gives me, until it may please him to cut short its course, which will be when it shall please him : for as for me, there is no longer, through his great mercy, anything which arrests me in this world."

The following Thursday, which was St Thomas's Day, our Lord bestowed a singular favour, surpassing the last two, inasmuch as the comparison he used expressed more fully the inseparable union between him and her. On this day, after receiving the Communion, he told her that he wished her to be like those little snails, who wherever they go carry their house and dwelling with them and never leave it : when anything strikes or attacks them they conceal

themselves, and so retire within that one sees only their shell, they themselves no longer appearing ; thus he wished himself to be her dwelling-house, her place of refuge, whence she would no more go out, that in all places and all circumstances he would conceal her and shut her up within himself, in order that nothing should any longer appear in her, save himself alone.

At the same time she found herself more than ever shut up in that divine dwelling, with a knowledge so clear and so certain of the greatness, excellence, and beauty of the place where she was, that she cried out with all her heart : " O my dear Love, it is two years since by your great mercy you gave me entrance into your house, whence you have never permitted me to go out for a single moment, and yet it seems to me I have only just entered, so much I see and know that I had never yet known or perceived." This she said because of the admirable views of his divine perfection God opened out to her, which hitherto she had not discovered.

God had behaved in her case like a kind father, who keeps his son in his house and shows him a thousand marks of tenderness and friendship in all circumstances ; but who yet does not display before him his treasures and riches until he has

attained an age, when he is able to value them at their true price. Thus this holy Soul, although for such a long time she had her dwelling in the heart of God, if we may so speak, and was lodged there as in her own house, yet Love kept her so powerfully occupied that she could do nothing else but love ; but after God had bestowed on her this last grace, there hardly passed a day when he did not give her new light, to make her understand the marvels of the place of her dwelling. This did not turn her aside from her love, but inflamed her still more and more ; so that she was overcome by it, and all this week she was almost obliged to keep her bed after receiving the holy Communion ; or at least, to retire into some corner, where she remained so feeble that she could scarcely move, though feeling no pain, and she seemed to herself to have neither body nor soul, but only an incredible Love which converted her wholly into itself.

On Christmas Day while hearing Mass there arose in her an intense and penetrating desire, that her Beloved should take birth in the hearts of all men ; and for this result she conjured him to do so with such profound affection, that it seemed to her that the Holy Spirit was the Author of her prayer, and that he furnished reasons and

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motives to bend the divine clemency to show them that mercy ; although she knew that God, on his side, was quite ready to do it, but that on their part, very few were disposed to receive it, inasmuch as by their sins and attachment to things of this world, they shut the door of their hearts and refused him entrance.

While these things were occupying her spirit she went to receive the Host, without almost perceiving it and without feeling her ordinary delights ; she merely continued still the same prayer, and when she was outside the church on her return home, it occurred to her that she had communicated as I have just told ; and being astonished how it could have been, she said to our Lord, " O my divine Love, to-day you came into me secretly and surreptitiously without making yourself known ; but it is vain for you to hide, I know well that I have received you." She did not say this by way of regret at his having so used her, for she was so indifferent that she did not give a thought whether God caressed her or not, being so possessed of him that she never reflected on what he was doing in her, unless he himself caused her to do so. This he did only to give an entrance to new graces, as appeared in the present instance, for no sooner was she arrived at home than God

made himself felt to her soul with such sweetness that she thought her last day had come, for it seemed her whole nature was about to dissolve away. All the remaining days of the year thus passed.

CHAPTER XIX

ON New Year's Day at dawn her heart was seized on her awakening with a bright flame of love which seemed to set her all on fire, together with a certain presentiment that doubtless her Beloved willed to give her a New Year's gift on that day, without, however, knowing in what fashion or manner it would be; for her heart was so full that it did not seem to her to be capable of receiving more. None the less she had a strong conviction that he reserved for her some further signal favour: sometimes without thinking she kept saying, "My Love, I believe you wish this morning to give me my New Year's gift."

When at Mass she was given a full knowledge of the grandeur and perfections contained in the most holy Name, JESUS, and of the ardent desire which God has to save and deliver all men from the miserable servitude of sin. To contribute to it on her part, she endeavoured with all her power through a very fervent Love to incite the divine Goodness to give to all the faithful, but especially those present at the Mass, the grace of

participating in the fruits and merits of this most holy Name, and that it might have full effect in them.

The nearer the time for holy Communion the more the mysteries of his August Name were opened up and disclosed to her, and the love of this Name kindled so powerfully in her soul that she had much difficulty in containing herself. But after communicating it was quite other flames, for our Lord made himself intimately perceived by her, making her see with the eyes of the soul, more clearly than she could have done with the eyes of the body, that he was gravating with his divine hand and imprinting in the depth of her heart his most adorable Name, Jesus, which remained with her ever since imprinted in a manner so admirable and so incomprehensible, that she afterwards declared, none but he who engraved it could tell the excellence of this grace ; which loaded her with such love that all this day and the following ones she spoke only of the grandeur of this divine Name : for to everyone she could speak to she said in a tone quite seraphic, " Give, give your hearts to Jesus, that he may there imprint his holy Name, He asks only that, and is quite ready to do it for all who will give themselves up to him. Yes, give them to him, that he may make

of them whatever he pleases." She uttered these words with such zeal that all in the house were astonished ; for she was not used to show outwardly what was passing within. They said to one another, that doubtless Armelle had received some special grace that day, and that it seemed Jesus was in her heart and on her lips.

Not without ground they spoke thus, for it was indeed imprinted there and made her utter these loving words which she addressed to him : " O my Love and my All, undoubtedly you have given me my New Year's gift, and you could not help caressing me on the first day of this year. It seems that you have your delight only when you do good to me, and that you could not pass a single day without conferring on me new graces." For about a fortnight she was in these raptures of love which that favour had caused. At the end of that time our Lord, who wished to do good to a certain Soul, gave Armelle so great a desire for her salvation, that day and night she had no other thought but of commending that person to him ; so that sometimes she said, " I believe my Love, that you wish me to forget you and myself to have no other care but of this Soul ; it seems my life and my health depend only on that." What made her speak thus was, that since God had given her this strong

impulse, her physical strength was so feeble that with difficulty could she support herself.

She came to see me at this time, and speaking of her health she said she was much better than usual, because she saw people trying to reconcile themselves to our Lord, and that this brought her as much relief as would an excellent remedy to a person extremely ill ; that yet her perfect cure would never come in this world, for her divine love was always much offended here. "Many times I said to him," continued she, "within the last fortnight, that if he wished me to be no longer ill, he should bring all the world to love him, acknowledge him and serve him, and that then I should be in good health, and as happy as one who saw his intimate friend triumph over all his subjects." "It seems," she further said to me, "that my divine Love no longer leaves me in the world but to procure his honour, and that I have no other business but seeing if his glory is increased ; this is my whole employment, and I do not work at it like a servant for his master, but as a spouse in the property of her husband, which she regards as their common property, nothing between them being separate. And to tell you truth I do not see myself at all in this, but God alone, in whom I am so plunged that most times I believe I have

neither life nor mind, but that they are lost in him, who alone supplies all this to me, and thus his honour, his glory, his insults, are mine : all that concerns him in short is all mine, as I am all his." Thus she often spoke to me, and indeed it was almost impossible for her to speak of anything else, for it was her genuine life, and what she experienced every day with such clearness, that it seemed God wished to make her one of the Blessed even in this world.

On the third Sunday in Lent, having risen very early and finding all those in the house still reposing, she said to herself that she also would have hers with her dear Love, and placing herself on her knees beside her bed, she adored the most holy Trinity by reciting three *Paters* and three *Aves*, as was her wont every morning. She had hardly finished them when the most holy Trinity manifested itself to her in an incomprehensible manner. As to that which these three adorable Persons made further known to her of their divine perfections ; it was Love. There the Eternal Father made her see that the infinite Love he bore to men had obliged him to give his Son for their redemption ; the Son made known to her that the Love he bore them had urged and forced him to become man and to suffer all the torments of his Life and Passion ;

the Holy Spirit made her understand that he, who is infinite Love, had given himself to them through this same love, and that he would give himself to them until the end of the world, in order to draw out all their Love. Afterwards they made her see that all Three were only One in Essence, and that they gave themselves to men to make them all similar. This grace and favour she received on that day; on which I can say only what she said, that, if the powerful hand of God did not greatly strengthen a Soul, it would be impossible for her to live after such revelations. Therefore she said to our Lord: "O my dear Love, what a great furnace you have kindled to burn me! I do not know but that I shall still feel it a week hence!" This she said with reference to that grace, and because when she thus received special ones, she used to be for some time in such a state, that the thing would be as present to her, and the love as inflamed, as when it had taken place.

CHAPTER XX

ON Palm Sunday, at waking, her heart was seized with violent grief accompanied by a great love, reflecting that the triumph and magnificent reception on this day accorded to her Saviour had been but to enhance the insult and disgrace of the death he suffered a few days later, and desiring to bear in her body as well as in her spirit the pains of her only Love, she asked to share in them. This she instantly obtained ; for she felt very great pains in all her body and in the heart a flame so quick and penetrating that she was compelled to keep her bed that and the two following days. One Tuesday this flame in her heart spread over her whole body, so that it seemed to her that her bed and every thing she touched was a burning fire which consumed her to the marrow of her bones, and at the same time God made her know that he willed her body as well as her spirit to be the sacrifice and victim of love to be burned with its flames. Then she cried to him with all her strength, " O my Love and my All ! You know that through your great mercy I will all that you

will, and that there is nothing in me which is not yours, and that if I knew that the smallest part of my flesh or the smallest bone of my body was opposed to your holy wills, I would instantly cut or tear it off and cast it away to the crows, or on a dung hill." She had hardly finished when this great fire withdrew and collected in her heart as before and left her body relieved and refreshed. "It seemed," she told me, "that God only asked of me this submission to his divine wills to afford me relief; and although he knew well through his grace I would not contradict him, he yet wished thereby to oblige me to assure him of it, and further to make me recognize the obligations I was under to his goodness, seeing that everything was submissive and subjected in me."

On the Wednesday and Thursday of this same week she was a little stronger than the previous days, the cause of which was, that she had found the means of assisting some utterly destitute sick poor who were perishing of poverty and want; for having obtained her mistress's leave she went to visit them, supplied them with good food, and with the help of pious and charitable persons procured for them the aids of the Holy Sacraments.

This circumstance, I say, had quite strength-

ened and invigorated her, as she confessed to me; but it was not for long, for from Thursday night to Good Friday the flames of divine love redoubled more than before, and all the torments of her Saviour were so vividly represented to her that there was not one in which she did not assist in spirit as if she were present at the place and time he endured them. The pain she conceived was so great that three times on this morning, she afterwards declared, she saw herself on the point of expiring. I questioned her if she did not then desire the assistance of anyone, or to receive the Sacraments; but she told me, that finding herself in the arms of Love, entirely sunk and absorbed in him, she had no other movement than to let him do whatever he should please, being as well inclined to death as to life.

About midday her divine Love withdrew her spirit from the view of his torments on earth to make her see them in Heaven as the Blessed contemplate them. She seemed to see all the Court of Heaven filled with joy and cheerfulness at the great Victory, which God had won over his enemies on this holy day, and that, in the sacred and divine person of his Son, they had all triumphed. She also saw Jesus Christ, who, all covered with blood and wounds, showed himself

to them in that state, and was clothed with his wounds as with a vesture of glory and honour, which gave a marvellous brilliance to his divine countenance, and an inexpressible happiness to all the Blessed. At the same time her loving Saviour invited her also to contemplate him in this way and to share in the common joy of all Heaven. Thus she passed the rest of the day, smitten with a very powerful and penetrating fire of love.

After all this, her body became wearied and ill, and as she needed a little rest to gain strength, God made manifest in this, as in all other circumstances, the care he had of her and what affected her ; for during some days he abated the ardour of her flames, which were consuming her and destroying her body, and he left her from Holy Saturday to Easter in a state quite suited to her indisposition, without her spirit experiencing anything that could in the least affect her. I was astonished to see her so indifferent and the heart void of that extraordinary love, which ordinarily she used to experience at these holy solemnities. She told me I should not be surprised, that the cause was simply that she needed it that her body might gain a little strength, and that it was not the first time her divine Love had a care not only of

her soul but of her body also, that he willed to be its Physician, and that she had observed, since to please him she had given up her wages and everything she had, and no longer had the means of paying for a physician or medicine, that he had undertaken this charge.

Then breaking out in wonder at the goodness of Love towards her, she cried, " See what excess of goodness ! A God deigns thus to have the care of his mean creature ! How after this not die and consume away from Love ? For the more frail and despicable I am in myself, the more God takes care of me, even in the smallest things. It is enough to ravish my spirit in admiration. Oh ! how good it is to abandon oneself, to cast oneself into the arms of Love ! Who can tell the care he has of those who do it with all their heart ? Oh ! undoubtedly only he and they ; for the world is incapable of conceiving such great excess of love and goodness."

Some days afterwards, having gone to see her Director and speak to him, her heart and mind were so seized upon and plunged in love that she thought she would be unable to say a word, and reflecting as to what she could say to her Director when he came, for she was in the College Church waiting for him, and being a little troubled on the point, our Lord who watched all her thoughts,

gave her a light thereon, and made her very clearly hear in the substance of her soul these two words, "My Daughter, I am thy Speech and thy Silence." Having heard these words spoken quite to the point, and marvelling at the excessive goodness of God towards her she was smitten with such a wonderful love that she almost fell in a faint, so that she was constrained to support herself against the wall. Her Director came when this great excess was a little over, and she told him the words our Lord had made her hear, which served as the opening for a discourse quite celestial and divine.

It is true that these words were so loving and full of mysteries that they were capable of bursting the heart, for she said, "Who is there could, unless supported by God, bear without dying such favours? That a God should say to his paltry creature, *"I am thy Speech and thy Silence."*

What these words effected in her soul besides this great love was, that ever after she took no trouble about her words or her silence; since God through the excess of his goodness was willing to be for her both the one and the other, and thenceforward she began to feel their effects; for her soul was afterwards in a continual silence up to Corpus Christi, without any interruption

of any kind either on the part of God or her own ; only from time to time the great love which burned in the depth of her soul cast out flames more quick and penetrating than usual ; but this took effect in silence on the part of both, and thus she continued up to Tuesday after Trinity Sunday. On that day, being with a person to whom she used to speak freely of the most secret things of her soul, this person designedly put her on the great mercies with which God had anticipated her.

After a sufficiently long conversation on this matter the worthy woman went home, her mind quite filled with the blessings God had so abundantly bestowed on her, in addition to which was the holy Eucharist, the festival of which was soon to be celebrated ;—these considerations kindled such a fire in her soul that she said it could set fire to hearts of ice or of marble. “ And as it is impossible,” continued she, “ that a Soul which truly loves, seeing herself anticipated with such graces, and that a God wills to do so much for her, should not have also on her side an extreme desire to do something for him, and to employ herself and quite consume herself in love, I found myself in this disposition at that time ; addressing myself to my God, I said to him from the depth of my soul, ‘ O my divine

Love! is there not anything still for me to do or to destroy to please you? and could I not show in some fashion the love I bear you? Is there anything still for me to do? Tell it to me and I will accomplish it though I should lose a thousand lives.' As I was saying these words, the following were said to me with such efficacy that I doubt not it was our Lord said them, 'Nothing at all,' and he repeated, 'Nothing, nothing at all, except to abandon yourself and to let me act.' At these words everything grew peaceful and calm in my soul, and I could do nothing but remain overwhelmed under the yoke and gentle burden of Love and die from its flames." These are the very words in which she related to me this favour which our Lord had shown her.

Before proceeding further it is necessary for the intelligence of what follows to explain the general and ordinary disposition of mind in which God had for a long time kept her; but which was extraordinarily increased from the opening of the Jubilee on the twenty-fifth of February in the year Sixteen hundred and fifty-two. This disposition was a continual view of the offences and insults which are committed every moment against the Sovereign Majesty of God, which caused such sensible and piercing

grief in her soul, that she often said death would be a thousand times easier to endure than to see her divine Love thus outraged by sinners : on the other hand, she felt such compassion that incessantly she claimed for them the divine Mercy, praying that it might enlighten the eyes of their soul, that they might recognize the precipice and misery awaiting them. God gave her wonderful knowledge on this matter, which made her utter words quite flaming, as well on the infinite goodness of God in bearing with sinners, as on the infinite malice of sin, and the blindness and stupidity of those that allow themselves to be carried away by it, and have no other pleasure but in offending infinite Love, who makes them incessantly feel the effects of his liberality and mercy.

Her mind amidst all these lights was placed in this state, which lasted from the commencement of the Jubilee until God introduced her into another state, that we shall mention below ; to which the former served as a preparation.

It seemed to her, that God had appointed her between him and them that she should obtain their peace and reconciliation with his divine Majesty ; for which she was employed in a manner so high and elevated, with a compassion so piercing and so loving for these poor sinners,

that it seemed she was feeling in truth something of the pains and anguish which the Son of God felt at the sight of sins while he was in the world, and after his example she strove to obtain their pardon and to pacify divine justice, using for the purpose supplications so touching and living, that it was clear she had no other principle but the Holy Spirit, who constrained her to this. Usually she used to say "My dear Love and my All, pardon them for they know not what they do," and much else which was spoken not by words, but which an interior voice and affection incessantly kept uttering in the deepest centre of her soul.

Her soul was established as an intermediary between God and sinners, feeling vividly the interests of both; but those of God were far stronger than those of men, and therefore she would have wished with all her heart to destroy sin and to prevent its ever being committed in the world. One day in the height of her love, she made prayers and entreaties to the Eternal Father, that by the merits of his Son he would destroy and annihilate sin, drawing all Souls to his Love and the knowledge of him by any manner whatsoever, provided he was no longer offended. In the very height of her entreaty, she heard the voice of God speak to her these words,

“ That it was a decree, given in the tribunal of his divine Wisdom, that men should continue in their free, unfettered, choice, to love him or to offend him ; and that according to that decree he could not force them, nor violate their freedom : but that he would draw them to him by the chains of his love.”

The following St James' Day, after Holy Communion, our Lord made her perceive his presence in a quite extraordinary manner. She saw in front of her as it were a person who was wishing to conceal and to defend another, and at the same time he gave her a strong impression by which he let her know, that henceforth he would always be between her and all the mishaps which might possibly befall her, to hinder any reaching her. From that time she found herself so surrounded and shut up in the divine protection, that it seemed to her, she said, that Jesus and his holy Love had made themselves like strong walls to guard and defend her, and that she was shut up in God as in a tower or impenetrable fortress, where nothing whatsoever could find entrance to reach her ; and in truth all that since then might have been capable of touching or attacking her, was, as she saw, received by God himself, without her feeling anything of it any more than if she had lost her

being. Astonished at this, she used often say to herself, "O poor Armelle, where art thou? Since the World, the Devil, or Sin, can no longer find or reach thee." To which the divine impression made answer, "Thou are no more: Thou art more lost in the ocean of my Divinity than the fish is in the Sea."

Some time afterwards our Lord wished to make known to what a point of purity and cleanness his Love had brought her, and this he did by showing himself as a person, who with a lighted lamp searches in all the corners and crannies of his house to see if he shall find anything which does not belong to him or which is displeasing to him. Thus our Lord acted in her soul, which was then established in a great emptiness, and he let her know that he had not found anything, and that there was none but himself alone dwelling there. This almost caused her to die on the spot from love and gratitude to his divine Majesty, who had effected in her such marvels.

In a conversation some days after the Festival of the Conception of the Virgin, she said the following words, "Since the Festival of my holy Mother I have seen my soul detached from all things, so pure, so disengaged, so single, that it does not seem to me she inhabits my body,

which as if insensible merely follows her. I have no longer any thought of anything which arrests, or occupies me in the ordinary way. There is one object alone, which is the Being and Immensity of God, that penetrates and consumes my soul in an inconceivable manner, and while consuming, renders her of such vast extent that I can perceive no bounds. Once I wished to do everything, to embrace everything ; but now it is not so ; for nothing any longer approaches me. I comprehend all and am not comprehended of anything. My soul is single, simple and pure, and when I see her thus it is as a marvel. If this continues sometime further in me I believe I must die. I go about as usual in external matters without losing this view ; but my God takes it away sometimes from me, permitting thoughts to pass through my mind which divert me from it ; otherwise I should be dead already. The Love which consumes me can be neither expressed nor conceived : it is as if infinite, and every day it still further increases." These are her own words.

In this way she passed all Advent, still seeing her soul removed and separate from her body, and her body following it, like a valet, his master, with such docility that it had not a movement save for this alone ; and her soul saw herself

led by the Spirit of God in a manner so clear and evident, that she said, "The Spirit of God animates my soul and gives her all the life and movement that she has. His life is my life; his heart is my heart; it is through him I breathe and live."

CHAPTER XXI

THE first day of the year 1653 she failed not to ask her divine Love to give her a new year's gift, and addressing our Lord she said, "O my Love and my All! you know it is usual with friends to give and ask from one another their new year's gift. I turn to you as my only and perfect friend, and I pray you give me for my present a great and living Faith and a constant presence of you, almost the same as with the Saints who see you in Heaven. For me, my Love, I can give you nothing; for in vain I search within and without me, I find nothing that is not already yours. You have taken away everything from me, and you have not left me the least part that you have not taken and changed into you; and thus I have no longer anything to give or offer you; but as for you, give me, I pray, what I have asked." These words formed themselves in her spirit, without her having taken any care to arrange them so; and she could not prevent herself uttering them, for, as we have often remarked, when God wished to bestow on her some signal grace, he usually

inspired her beforehand and urged her vehemently, to make her ask it from him. This she had constant experience of. From the moment her prayer was finished God shed in her soul a great light, and such an assured and certain presence of his Majesty, that she saw him as do the Saints in Heaven, which cannot be better explained than in her own words.

“ I was,” she said, “ the first eight or ten days of the year in a great assurance that my Love and my All had granted me what I asked of him ; for it is impossible to convey the clearness of the faith he gave me of his divine presence. I saw him clearly in my soul and all the operations his divine Love was carrying on there. As for me, I was steadfast, without movement and hardly able to breathe ; I had no pulse ; in short, I was dead to nature and lived the life of God, attentive to see him, and to burn with a love sweet and delectable, as the Saints burn in Heaven. I had no thought of anything whatsoever, for God it was who thought and did everything. In short, I cannot tell what, or how, I was, except by saying that God alone acted and effected everything ; and as for me, I saw him clearly, and remained attentive and on fire with a very great love, in a light which

seemed to surpass that of faith, so evident was it, and which increased still more on the Day of the Kings (Epiphany). During all this time I was so feeble that I could scarcely move. I had much difficulty in taking any food save the holy Communion; not that I had any disgust, but I was so full, soul and body, that this alone was more than enough to sustain me. At first when this took place I was exercised by great pains, but these all went off; so that I kept saying to myself, 'O, how true it is, that love is stronger than all things; for it absorbs and swallows up all, and makes one feel and breathe only it alone.' " Having in this state gone to see her Director, she said to him after some discourse on the mercies of God towards her, "Oh, my Father, how willingly would I make the passage from this life to the other! for it seems to me that there is only half a step between me and it already."

Some time after our Lord made her know, that this passage had already been made, and that *she belonged no more to this world*. He made her understand, that if she was still of it, she could not possibly have lived with the love, the purity and innocence, in which she was living; and that she saw it clearly by the continued view she had of God, that there was no longer any-

thing between them both. This made her utter with all the gratitude of her whole heart, "It is true, my Lord, that you treat me as you treat your Angels and your Saints, who see you incessantly. May your Holy Name be for ever blessed." All this confirmed her in the certainty she had, that God had granted her prayer, made at the commencement of the year, to be always in his divine presence. This view of God was not merely at intervals and fleeting, but was habitual. It was a firm and settled state, where she seemed to be confirmed and established. Therefore she said, "Nothing in the world can thence withdraw my view: one could easier hinder the flow and ebb of the tide than make me turn my sight elsewhere."

Long before this, as we have already mentioned, our Lord had opened the door of his divine heart to her, to lodge her there, that it might be the place of her dwelling; but, on the eve of the Presentation of our Lord in the Temple, he wished to show her in a quite new fashion that he had lodged her and introduced her into the sacred Temple of his divine heart, and that she was there in her own house. This is how she described her state: "I found myself shut up and lodged in the sacred heart of Jesus with such love, glory, and freedom, that I could

not comprehend it. I was at large and quite at my ease; nothing cramped me. I saw this divine heart of such a vast extension that thousands of entire worlds could not have filled it.

I saw further that all those, who lodge within through love, enjoy a true and entire liberty and wonderful peace; on the other hand, I saw that the door of entrance was so small and so narrow that very few could find entrance there, and surprised I said, "O my Love and my All, how is it that your heart is large and spacious, and one is so at large when within it, and yet the door of entrance is so small and narrow? Then our Lord made known to me, that it was because he *wanted only the small, the naked, and the single to be able to find entrance*. The *small* are those, who with all the heart humble and abase themselves through love of him, these can enter; the rest, not at all. For how could a person swelled up with an esteem and opinion of himself pass through such a small door? The *naked* are those, who detach their heart from the covetousness of the riches, and the comforts of this life; for the rest, burdened with gold and silver, or other things, it is impossible to pass such a narrow place, until they have got rid of their loads. The *single* are those

who detach their love from all creatures ; for love binds and attaches the heart to the thing loved ; and how can two bound together pass where there is hardly room for one ?

The days of the Carnival debaucheries approaching, she felt herself still more inflamed ; at which she was no wise astonished, for it was usual with her to be so during those miserable days, when most men forgot God ; and as she found herself so loaded with graces that she could hardly keep up, she said to our Lord, " O my divine Love, since all the world rejects you, this is a good reason for you to keep to your friends, and that they should aid you to carry your Cross and the burden of the sins which are being committed. You so act with me, whom your Love has made your friend and your bride. You lay on me great burdens ; the one, from the affliction and extreme pain I have at seeing you offended ; but the other utterly overwhelms me, that is, the abundance of your graces. It seems, that all which the world rejects you pour out in me ; since through your great mercy you have made me a heart capable of all which you will. Blessed be your Holy Name for ever ! "

During these days of Carnival, being thus occupied with her divine Love, she found her

heart one day so tender that she did nothing but weep, and knew not why ; for the ardour of the love which then occupied her was so great that it had taken out of sight and memory the offences against God and everything else. After she had much wept, and on recovering herself a little was seeking the cause, she found it was her divine Love who made her shed those tears for sinners, since he was no longer himself in a condition to do so.

On the first day of Lent there came to her a great desire to suffer something for her Love. Her desire was accomplished, but not in the ordinary way ; for God did not send suffering in the body. He permitted that, having a business to clear up with a person which closely concerned her, her mind insensibly dwelt an entire day in thinking from time to time of what had happened. On perceiving this she was much vexed to see that her understanding had been ever so little turned aside from God, so that she said the pain would have been insupportable had not God quickly applied the remedy. The following night she saw herself in the spirit introduced into the presence of the most Holy Trinity, as if she had been amidst the Courts of Angels, and the sight of God which she had previously had was still more clear than ever.

This made her say to our Lord, "O my dear Love, it seems that one had wished to draw a curtain between you and me to hinder me from seeing and contemplating you ; but your Love could not suffer it. You have quickly removed it to make yourself still more clearly seen than I ever saw you before."

Afterwards, as she was thinking in herself whether anything would have been able to turn aside her look from such an amiable Object, and was resolving henceforth to avoid anything which could cause this evil, saying in the depth of her heart, "O never, my Love, no, never will I have to do with any one who can withdraw a thought from you, for I cannot pass a moment elsewhere." While in these holy affections, our Lord said to her, "that she was attached to the trunk of the tree of Life and that this tree is God ; and that, happen what might, nothing could ever detach her from it."

These last words produced a very great effect in her heart through the excessive love they kindled there, and for many days she seemed to hear continuously the voice of her Beloved, who kept saying to her the same thing. The desire then arose in her to ask him, "Why, my Love and my All, do you say that I am attached

to the trunk of the Tree of Life rather than to the branches ? ” “ Because, my Daughter,” answered our Lord, “ thou art attached to Me Alone, who am the trunk and the stem of eternal life, and not to my gifts and my favours, which are merely the branches that may be cut from it and separated, with those who are attached thereto ; but those who like thee are joined to the trunk, seeking only Me Alone, shall never be separated.” These words well deserve the attention of all those into whose hands it shall please God that this writing fall.

It seems that our Lord made her hear them only with a view to dispose her for the state into which he brought her a few days afterwards, to make her know, and those who directed her conscience, that in truth she was attached only to God alone, and not to the graces or extraordinary favours, which he had been wont to confer on her every moment ; for after having enjoyed for some time an ineffable love, the source of which was in the divine Being, into whom God made her know and feel that she was entirely transformed, he suddenly withdrew her spirit from the view of the operations he was carrying on in her soul, and left her as if naked and despoiled of everything ; but nevertheless in a manner so admirable that it merits well

to be recorded more at length in her own words :

“ I found myself,” said she, “ with respect to my divine Love like a person who, after having associated and conversed familiarly with his intimate friend, seen and heard all his secrets, and enjoyed fully the delight of his love, perceives that his friend wishes to do something for his good, of which, through an excess of goodness, he is unwilling to give him the knowledge until his design has been accomplished, and accordingly keeps secret from him all that he is doing. This is how I felt at the commencement of that state. I knew that my only Love was enclosed in the inmost of my soul and that he there was working for his glory and my good ; but I knew not what he was there doing ; my mind was at the door of this sanctuary, without daring or wishing to enter within. I was thus at Easter and the week following, after which I found myself so poor and so denuded of everything that never had I been in such great scarcity. Nothing any more occupied my mind, either interior or exterior. It seemed to me that I had no longer either faith, or love, or attention to my God, save at intervals, and rarely. I was a little surprised at this novel state, without however wishing otherwise,

having through the mercy of God no other will but his.

“After eight or ten days, when I went to receive the holy Communion, my divine Love made me understand that he had taken from me everything I had, as they do to persons that are declared spendthrifts, who are deprived of the power of using their wealth. Then I said to him, ‘I am not astonished, my Love, that you hide yourself from me, for when one is to be declared spendthrift nothing is said to him until the business is finished; so have you acted in my case, by rendering me poor, and despoiling me of everything: Blessed for ever be your Holy Name!’ After these words I continued as I was previously, and when I explained my state to my Director, he told me that I had never been better off than then, because all one can see, receive, or experience, of God in this world, is not purely God; and that by this nudity and poverty he was wishing to make a new approach to my soul. They were such that I saw my nothingness quite laid bare: my mind was very free and nothing occupied it. Thus I continued until the Ascension.

“On that day I felt in me two wills, the one was that which through the mercy of God I have always had, namely, of being very contented

with the state in which I found myself, wishing nothing from Heaven or Earth but what I had from moment to moment. But besides this will, I felt another which watched for and desired something new, and of this I tried to rid myself as much as I could lest I should offend my divine Love ; but the more I endeavoured the more this will increased, and this made me believe that it was without doubt the Holy Spirit who was forming in me this desire, and thus I passed the whole day ; but the thought occurred to me that Love willed to confer on me some new grace. The next morning at waking my mind was raised to contemplate, as if without veil, the glory which my Saviour enjoyed in Heaven through his glorious Ascension. And I saw that from his divine Heart issued forth a cord of love and charity, which came to bind and fasten mine so tightly, that the Heart of Jesus and mine could never more be separated. I could give no description of the love I then felt. It was in no wise a human love, or which was produced from me ; but it was the Charity of God which overflowed in me. In this state I communicated, without thinking on what I was doing, my look being still engaged in Heaven. In this state I continued until the following Sunday, when going to receive the holy Communion, I

saw that the cord which kept my heart attached gathered itself in and shut itself up in the Heart of Jesus, and by this means it united and drew together his and mine in a way that I cannot explain.

“Thinking to myself of the great grace God had bestowed on me through the merits of his holy Ascension, he gave me to understand that my divine love had treated me as he had done the holy Apostles, from whom he had separated himself as to corporal presence only in order to give them a greater abundance of graces and celestial consolations ; and considering how my heart was thus bound to that of Jesus. Oh ! how I wished and desired that all the hearts of men were thus bound and attached to that divine Goodness, that they might never be able to separate from it ! I passed several days in these views and affections, after which I returned to my former state, feeling only a holy and divine flame, which is the pure love of my God, who loves himself and has his pleasure in me, and in loving himself in this way destroys me, consumes me, and reduces me wholly into himself and makes my life to be more than human.”

At the end of the Octave of the Assumption of the most holy Virgin, our Lord according to his custom willed to confer on his faithful servant

some signal favour, and as her soul had reached an eminent degree of transformation into him, as we have seen, his Majesty took pleasure in making her understand it in a thousand ways full of love and mysteries, which artlessly exhibited her state. Some days after the Festival of the Holy Virgin he made himself seen and felt in the inmost of her soul after the fashion of a great sea, which had no bounds, and she delighted herself and took her pleasure and her nourishment in this Ocean, like a fish. Here are her own words: "Being there," she said, "my Love gave me to know, that as the fish cannot live nor exist out of the water, so I could not live a moment out of him, and as in whatever direction the fish turns he always finds water, so in whatever place or manner I might be I should always find him. I was nearly a month with this view, at the end of which I lost the idea of the sea and the fish to have only that of God alone, who made himself perceived as shut up in the secrecy of my soul, as her Conductor and Counsellor, so that whatever offered itself to be done concerning either external or internal matters, I was invited to enter into this secret cabinet to receive orders on all I had to do or say, where I was given a certain and assured light for everything."

While all these operations passed in her soul her body was greatly weakened by the excess of divine love, but having been sent into the fields where she had many occupations, and being in need of strength and health to discharge them, our Lord gave it to her for the space of two months that her toil lasted.

CHAPTER XXII

It was near Lent of the following year that her Beloved, filled with mercy and compassion for the loss of so many Souls redeemed by his precious blood, made her know, by a divine impression, that he wished her to employ herself to withdraw from sin these poor miserable sinners, saying to her in the inmost of her soul, " my beloved, thou art so won to Love that I leave thee in this world only for the purpose of drawing to it thy brothers, who estrange themselves from me by their sins : " and at the same moment he gave her such a lively feeling, at seeing her God so scorned by his creatures, and such a penetrating grief at their loss, that she could no longer doubt as to the sufferings with which our Lord willed to afflict her heart when he made her desire them so ardently at the commencement of the year.

" When," said she to me, " my soul was most sunk in the knowledge of the mercies of my God towards me, and my heart most on fire, or rather consumed by his divine Love, desiring with very great vehemence that all creatures should love

him and praise him, it was then I knew more clearly than ever their ingratitude towards such an amiable Goodness and the blindness of the poor Souls, who turn aside from their sovereign good to cast themselves into an infinite unhappiness. Oh! how great and bitter were the distresses of my heart from these views, which daily increased to such excess that I lost all my strength! I could have wished to tear myself in pieces to repair the insults offered to Love. All I learned redoubled my pain; for he made me know that no one loved him purely, even among those who make profession of virtue; each one having his own ends and aims in scorn of his divine will."

"As for those who abandon themselves to vice, Good God! what knowledge have I not had of it! For very often it happened that persons with whom I had no acquaintance accosted me, to declare the terrible sins which were being committed, and in such secrecy, that I was surprised and startled how these things could be known; while they were told to me in all their circumstances. This pierced my heart with such extreme pain, that if my heart had been thrust through with a sword I could not have felt so much. I made my plaint to Love and asked why he permitted that I

should know these things ; but he made me understand '*that, his goods being mine, his ills must be mine also,*' which only still more tortured me and increased the pain of my sufferings."

It was in truth worthy of admiration to see the zeal of this holy woman to promote the glory of God, in preventing through her prayers and her energies that he should be offended. All her thoughts, prayers, and actions had no other end. She apparently forgot herself to think only of the salvation of her neighbour. To hear her one would have thought that she had to render an account to God of each one. During this time she knew persons of whom she had not previously even heard. She prayed, and caused others to pray, for the salvation of their souls, and had no rest until she had endeavoured to find some remedy for their irregularities. She was so concerned for their misfortune as to touch the hardest hearts.

Once a person unknown to her accosted her to tell of infamous deeds that were being committed in a certain house so secretly that, with the exception of the guilty, no one knew of them ; and as they were persons of rank it was a difficult thing to find a remedy for these irregularities ; besides her condition as a servant much restrained her ; but the love of God and the zeal

she had for the salvation of those persons, enabled her to find a means of withdrawing them from their sins and making them give up vice.

It was easy for those who knew her intimately to perceive when she had received similar news, for she was then so extraordinarily downcast that her life seemed at stake. I often questioned her when I saw her in this state, and it always turned out that some new offence had wounded her heart. When I enquired who had told it to her, she used to say, "I do not know, but it seems that Love wishes me to feel all his wounds, and that every one is hired to tell them to me."

One day when conversing with a great servant of God, who touched with the same sentiment at seeing him offended, was led to utter these words: "Let us quit, quit the earth, which is only sin and filth, and let us go to Heaven, where God is no more offended." She replied with an accent full of zeal, "What, my Father, is it thus you love your poor brethren? Do you wish to leave them to perish in their miseries? No, we must remain in this world to aid them to reach Heaven, that all together we may praise and bless Love." This was in truth her only employment, day and night. But to tell what passed between God and her is out of my power, for although she was always disturbed at the

sins of her neighbours, this in no wise hindered the inconceivable joys she received from the sweet union of her soul with her Beloved, which she enjoyed to her heart's content in such a wonderful calm and tranquillity that one would have taken her rather for a soul of the Blessed than for one clothed still in mortal flesh. Her Saviour had in this made her like himself when he lived here below on earth, suffering in his soul an infinite grief at seeing his Father offended, and at the same time enjoying the immense delights of his union with the Divinity. This was the state she bore almost the entire year.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN the month of October occurred a thing which will seem at first sight rather deserving of censure than of approval, particularly in a servant. It is, that many persons of virtue and merit had conceived so great an esteem for her saintliness, that they greatly wished to have her portrait taken, which was a genuine picture of modesty. They spoke to a painter, but he said he could not do it without her knowledge, nor unless she sat regularly for it.

Her Director at first feared to propose it to her, lest she should make a difficulty, but at last he spoke to her. She answered, "My Father, if you believe God will be glorified by it I am ready to do whatever you please."

The painter having set about taking her picture, Eternal Wisdom began to make another in the inmost of this Soul. "Having," she said, "withdrawn within myself, our Lord made me see the beauty with which my soul was adorned when regenerated by the waters of Baptism, pure, beautiful, without stain or defilement, but like a beautiful image made in resemblance of the

Divinity. Afterwards he made me see all my sins as stains which had spoiled, defiled, and defaced this beautiful image, so that no sign of its former beauty remained. At sight of this I conceived such grief at my offences that I knew not what to do. Tears flowed so abundantly that I was obliged to withdraw, telling the painter that I felt ill. This sight filled me the whole day; and the next day, the painter wishing to finish his picture, our Lord presented himself to my soul and showed me that from all eternity he had reserved her for himself, to paint there the infinite perfections of his Divinity, and that to efface the stains he had shed all his precious blood, which he had used as brilliant colours to embellish her; that she was a foundation on which divine Love, like a brush guided by the hand of his Wisdom, had never ceased working, and that at last he had rendered her so beautiful and so perfect that she was like to himself much more than she had been before I had spoiled her by my sins. O God! what love and what grief did my poor heart then feel! It was such that had not God supported me I had died on the spot."

Now while these admirable operations were taking place in her spirit, the painter was much hindered in finishing his work, and could not

succeed owing to the various changes he remarked in her face ; for he assured me he never looked at her that he did not see her different, at one time she was inflamed like a Seraph and then pale as death, the eyes constantly filled with tears—her appearance so sunk and absorbed, with a modesty so divine, that it was impossible, whatever trouble he took, to express with his brush what the hand of God had imprinted on her face. His work was therefore poor enough, and as he was ignorant of the cause of these constant changes he attributed it to shyness and shame at being looked at, so he only dared to half look at her. He was charmed and edified by her modesty, and he told me he deemed himself for ever fortunate in having seen this holy woman, and that in his life he had never observed such saintliness.

CHAPTER XXIV

ABOUT Christmas our Lord gave her such high notions of the admirable virtue of poverty, and so powerful a desire to practise it in the most eminent manner, that she burned with longing to bind herself to it by a vow. It is true that many years before she had felt this desire, but she had not then been able to effect it. The day assigned to make this vow of poverty was the first of the year 1655, but diverse causes delayed it until the Purification of the holy Virgin. As to the disposition of her soul after making this vow, here is what she subsequently declared to me :

“ I would never have believed,” said she, “ that so many blessings were contained in the vow of poverty as my divine Love has made known to me, and although through his grace I was not attached to anything, I nevertheless cannot explain the freedom and detachment I find myself in ; having nothing now but pure Love, I am in a condition to no longer hope for anything but from him alone ; and since he has despoiled me of all, he has given himself entire

in exchange. You would have said he was only waiting for this from me to make me enter into participation of his divine plenitude. All he had given me up to now appears nothing in comparison with the profusion in which he now communicates himself to my soul. It seems to me that since the vow I made him my Love has darted and cast himself into the inmost of my soul and into all my powers, which he has so abundantly filled with himself that I seem to be already in glory."

She was in this state of plenitude of God for more than a month after her vow, when it pleased her divine Love to place her in a disposition quite opposed to this, reducing her to a state of spiritual poverty so great and so profound that she could not make it understood or comprehended. It was not a desertion, nor a dryness ; no, her state was exalted above all that, and she made no reflection on it ; for the union to which she had attained permitted her to make no distinction between the presence and absence of her Beloved. The poverty to which she was reduced, being of a nature quite different from what is ordinarily understood under these terms, ought rather be called an abundance of divine riches than a want of them. " I find myself now through the grace of my God," said she, " as poor interiorly

as exteriorly. My divine Love has despoiled me of all : he no longer communicates himself, nor flows into my soul or into any of my powers. They are all free in their functions, and I can apply myself with facility to everything which has to be done, without any hindrance ; but he has withdrawn into the centre of my soul, where he governs and acts in me in a way I cannot make intelligible."

Here we have the most usual state of her soul since she made her vow, the first month excepted. It is true that from time to time there occurred something distinct, but very rarely. I can only remember that, having seen her about the Festival of the Ascension and found her extraordinarily moved by divine Love, I asked the cause. She answered, that for some days her mind was penetrated with grief for the sins of men, and full of the desire to render to God, according to her power, the honour of which sinners deprived him by their sins, and after shedding many tears she had fallen into a quite mysterious sleep. In this she seemed to see a person veiled like a nun, who, exhibiting excessive grief at the offences committed against God, urged her to feel them and to pray for the sinners, and several times repeated to her these words : " Let us love, let us love." " This person,"

she continued, " appeared to me so smitten with divine love that I felt myself like ice alongside her, and after she had many times said to me, ' Let us love,' she said, ' I give thee a share of my Love,' and at the same moment I felt a love so penetrating, so living, and surpassing so strongly what I previously had, that I was near dying from it. She disappeared at the same time, and I was convinced it was the holy Virgin who had bestowed that grace. When I awoke from sleep I no longer knew myself, so ardent and penetrating was the fire of divine Love, and ever since I have been in the state you now see me."

Our Lord, willing to call to him the mistress of our good Armelle, sent her a very long and troublesome illness, in which this faithful servant rendered her all the services and assistance that were possible, and with such assiduity, that she did not leave her day or night except for things absolutely necessary. As a consequence she came very seldom to see me during the eighteen months this illness lasted ; I can therefore not relate what passed in her soul until after the death of her mistress, which took place in October 1656. Having seen her some time after, on my enquiries as to particulars of her soul, she told me she had no idea of them,

as she was able to preserve none but that of pure Love, who most ordinarily kept her in the state of purity and poverty described before.

CHAPTER XXV

ALMOST all the time of her mistress's illness God had left the soul of this holy woman the free use of her faculties, without communicating to her any extraordinary grace, which might have hindered her rendering all the services she was required to her worthy mistress. This was the usual way God acted to her, as appears in this Life ; but on this occasion it was more apparent, as the period of time was much longer ; so that she believed the rest of her life would pass in this state, at which she was quite happy, since she therein saw the will of her Beloved. But very soon after the decease of her mistress she began to experience divine communications, which flowed through her soul with such impetuosity that they seemed to have been kept back and arrested by the circumstances mentioned.

He discovered to her then by a ray of his light the profound abyss of his infinite Goodness, Meekness, Peace and Tranquillity, as dwelling in the midst of his heart, and showed her that she possessed all these treasures in the depth of

her soul. At the same time he made her feel, as far as she was capable, the same qualities which he showed to be in her, so that she seemed to have become all goodness, all peace, all meekness, all tranquillity. No other thought entered her mind and she could not even say any other word but this, "Goodness of my God! Meekness of my God! Peace of my God!" She would spend whole days repeating these words without tiring, and at night during her sleep she thought of nothing else in her dreams. On waking in the morning she found these words coming from her mouth, without any fixed intention, and her heart was as if drowned and submerged in the meekness and immense goodness of her God.

During this powerful experience, lasting over a month, she found herself so vigorous that she seemed to be in perfect health. "I was," said she, "so vigorous that I did not know myself; but it was a strength that was given me, to desire ardently that my Love should be loved and served by all his creatures. Oh! it seems to me, that were I allowed to cast into the hearts of men the least spark of the fire of holy Love which I feel, it would set them on fire, though they were ice! O infinite Goodness of my God, why are you so great in my case, and why do

you not communicate yourself to others as well as to me, that all may be consumed by your Love! O Meekness of my God, who can comprehend, who can conceive the close union that you have with your paltry creature! "

For not more than a month she experienced this strength and vigour, after which she returned to her ordinary state of weakness and languor, but both alike caused by the divine operation. After having discovered to her his divine treasures which she held enclosed in her own breast, he showed her what she would be through all eternity. "For several days," she told me, "I seemed to see a great fire wherever I went, in which was a burning brand that this fire incessantly consumed, but which subsisted none the less; and as I did not know what this meant, our Lord made known to me that this fire was none other than his Love, and that the brand was myself." When relating to me this remarkable favour, she was so exalted and so filled with love and gratitude for the bounties of God to her, that it seemed her heart would burst in pieces; one would have thought her soul was about to leave her body. "O infinite Goodness of my God," said she, "how great is your Love towards your paltry creature! Oh! what a union you have made of a worm of the earth

with your divine Majesty ! Union which never is interrupted ! Union which has made me like to you ! for my love which is the bond of this union is a sharing in your infinite Love towards your creatures, and the sanctity which sanctifies me is a participation in yours. Oh ! it is long since there has been either trouble or war in this poor heart because you govern it. In short, my God, I am no longer, but YOU ALONE ; you live in me."

Her discourse was extremely long ; this little will suffice to give some conception of the state of this great Soul, and I cannot omit what she further told me, that from the Festival of Christmas she saw that the eyes of her divine Love were unceasingly fixed upon her, and reciprocally they attracted those of her soul. It was in this mutual and divine regard that she passed almost the whole year. Her soul was so lost in this divine look that she did not understand it herself. She was as free to act in external matters as if nothing was taking place within her, and she had even good health so as to discharge all that was necessary of her house work. Thus she continued until the month of October, when constantly considering the goodness and perfections of her Beloved, her natural strength was extraordinarily reduced,

and in a few days she was so weak that she could scarcely move. She was full and satiated with the goods of God which she had acquired by that divine look ; and she had such a disgust for all things of this world that, whatever effort she made, she could take no food but a few drops of broth.

Three weeks thus passed, when she had a strong wish to go and visit the tomb of St Vincent Fernier, Protector of that town to whom she had a special devotion. While there she felt such a powerful action of divine Love, and her strength so weakened that she thought her last hour had come, and leaning as best she could against the wall, she said to our Lord : " My Love, if it was your Will, I should be very happy to die in this place, but if it is not your good pleasure, finish what is so far advanced." Wonderful instance of the goodness of God towards his faithful servant ! She had hardly finished her prayer when she found herself as strong, as sound, as active as ever, and her appetite as good as when in the best health. This was a new ground for her loving her Benefactor, and for thinking that he willed still to leave her in this world to burn and consume with his Love.

CHAPTER XXVI

A PRAYER which she had often made during her life was in part granted, and from Ascension Day of the year 1658 she passed almost the rest of her days without God communicating to her anything of an extraordinary nature ; not that he had deserted her, but he worked in the depth of her soul in so divine and exalted a manner that she herself did not comprehend it, and could give no account thereof. Here is what she one day said to her Director and to me, who had several times enquired about the state of her interior disposition, " My Father," speaking to her Director, " I believe that my Love and my All has at last heard the prayer I so often made, that he would deprive me of all his graces and favours in order to give them to those who knew him not, that by this means they might be led to love him with all the heart ; and that I would willingly deprive myself of every good in order that my God should be loved by a single Soul. He knows that I have never desired anything but himself alone, and now he gives himself to me in that way. He is enclosed in this

poor heart which he governs as God. I am quite certain he is there. Oh ! what peace and what tranquillity reigns there ! No : there is no longer anything in this poor heart save GOD QUITE ALONE, and this is Life Eternal."

Then addressing herself to her divine Love, she said to him, " O my Love and my All ! who could ever have thought to see this heart in the state in which it is ? O Love ! although you are always the same, yet how different you are in your operations, and how well you know how to accommodate yourself to our weaknesses ! Where is the time, O divine Love ! when you acted in this heart as Conqueror and Vanquisher, armed with fire and flames, burning, setting fire to, consuming everything that opposed itself to your divine volitions, penetrating it with your darts and your arrows, so that each day I expected to die ? And you never left it at rest until you had conquered and triumphed. Afterwards, O divine Love, you reigned there as King, peaceful and powerful ; as Father, very gentle and pitiful ; and as Spouse, full of love and liberal, distributing to it your graces and your favours with an excess that you alone know, O divine Love ! And now you reign there as God. Yes : my God, you are there, quite such as you are, incomprehensible and inaccessible,

in this poor heart that you so guard that nothing approaches it but YOU ALONE."

From these words one may judge of the interior state of this great Soul in her latter years, during which God communicated himself to her as God. It is not that sometimes she did not feel the flames of his divine Love, more quick and penetrating at one time than another ; but, as it was without any intermediary, she could not make it understood. She had then always this presence of God in the manner described. As to her exterior, everything was quite ordinary, showing nothing else but an eminent sanctity in all her actions. Her health was fairly good, with freedom and presence of mind to discharge the duties of her station, until it pleased our Lord to deprive her of it by an accident.

CHAPTER XXVII

BEFORE concluding this narrative I will give a few extracts taken from the second Part of the original Life which illustrate the saintliness of its subject and the perfection of Divine Love manifested in her.

“Never,” she used to say, “had I asked anything so much of my divine Love as this ardent prayer which I made to him every day, that of his divine mercy it would please him to place me among the number of his Disciples and give me admittance to his School and make me a servant in his Holy House and receive me into his Company as he had done his Apostles and Disciples. Alas! when I made these prayers with so much fervour that often I was beside myself, I did not know, nor understand, what I was saying. But, O my God, how well I afterwards understood the sense of my words and how you have accomplished my requests; for by your great mercy you have received me into your School and you have admitted me to your Company, where I, poor ignorant that I am, have learned more in one day than all men

together could have taught me in my whole life.

“ After God had showed me this favour, to make me always feel his presence, and he was pleased to undertake my conducting, I abandoned myself entirely to him ; so that I no longer considered myself but as the Disciple of God and Schoolgirl of the Holy Spirit. I was always attentive in myself to love him and to consider what he commanded me, to carry it out ; and when anything arose to be done, I behaved exactly as a servant or Disciple does to his master’s order. In doing it I had my view directed upon him, to imitate what he had done in this world ; and if it was a thing which he had not done, he taught me the manner of accomplishing it in the way most agreeable to him.

“ Thus in all things great and small he instructed me, and not only he instructed me, but he himself by an excess of goodness governed me, and sometimes he made me understand that I was like those little scholars who commence learning to write, to whom the master is not satisfied with giving an example or a model, but himself takes the hand of the pupil and guides it, in order to teach him thus to form his letters. I was exactly the same in regard to God, and often I felt as if another hand guided

mine. This was no matter of the imagination or fancy, but the genuine and pure truth, which I saw more clearly than the day."

"In all circumstances I had recourse to my God with more freedom than a beloved child has to his father, who idolizes him. I conversed confidentially with him. I told him all my troubles, all my wants and needs. I consoled myself with him. I rejoiced at his divine perfections. I asked him what was needed for me and for my neighbours, whom I regarded as my own brothers. If I wished to treat with him as with my intimate Friend, he listened to me and treated me in this relation, communicating to me his secrets, as two friends do, one to the other. If I addressed myself to him as a poor Disciple, rude and ignorant, he instructed me in my doubts, enlightened me in my obscurities, encouraged me in my weaknesses, corrected and reproved me with love and strictness in my faults, teaching me himself the fashion and manner in which I ought to perform my actions; making me in all things know that which was best, to follow it, and that which was bad, to avoid it.

"If my love led me to consider him as my Spouse, it was here he made me sensible of the greatest endearments and favours; which were

such as would pass for incredible to any one who had not experienced them. Then he gave himself entirely to me, as I gave myself entirely to him ; then he made me understand that he was wholly mine ; then he caressed me, united me and transformed me ; and that at every hour, every moment, without anything in the world being able to separate me from him, caressing me so tenderly that I was forced to say to him that I could endure no more, and that if he continued he would cause me to die. At other times I used to say to him that it seemed he had nothing else to do but to caress and console me ; and sometimes the force of this same love drew from my mouth these words, ' Ah, my dear Love ! if the world knew the tenderness you every moment make me experience, it would say that the love you bear me is excessive ; and if I dared, I would say it myself.' "

On the Day of Conversion of St Paul 1643, she was awaked by hearing herself called in a loud voice, which she mistook at first for that of her fellow-servant, who, however, had not done so. At the end of a week, as she thought with herself what it could mean, she was told interiorly that by this God called her to an entire fidelity. She then asked, " What is Fidelity ? " The answer was, " It is to do perfectly as well small

things as great ; for Fidelity is that which unites the soul to God, and infidelity separates us."

In her low origin and condition of a servant she found motive of unceasing thankfulness to God. "When I consider," she used to say, "the good fortune of my condition and the great advantages therein, I can never weary of blessing my divine Love for having placed me in it, and I find nothing in the world more desirable, nor which ought to be more esteemed and cherished, than this ; for it is a place where one has to live continually despised by every one : who could make count of a poor servant ? Every one has power to reprove and despise her, and to find fault with all she does or says. Does not this teach one to keep humble, to put one's reliance and confidence in God, and to seek only to please him ? Therefore often I have been astonished to see poor girls complain and afflict themselves at what should rejoice and console them. O poor creatures ! I used to say to myself, if you knew the great good there is in being despised, chidden and ill-treated, you would feel joy in place of the sadness which gnaws you."

When urged to give up her occupation as a servant to embrace a life offering, as was thought, greater scope for spiritual contemplation, she

said, that her work and her occupation did not hinder her from enjoying God ; on the contrary, she had remarked that the more she worked and employed herself for her Love in all the worries of housework, the more he communicated himself to her ; that she would commit a great infidelity to leave her work for rest ; that God knows how to find souls everywhere, provided the entrance of the heart is not closed against him.

“ And the idea that a mean servant, a poor village girl, a worm of the earth like me, should have pride ! One must be mad to come to that, or else not know what I know. If God has had pity on me ; if he has deigned to undertake himself the troubles of instructing, of teaching me, of giving me lights and knowledge that poor peasants such as I do not ordinarily possess : if he has forestalled me with his graces, burnt and consumed me with his divine Love ; it has been his goodness and mercy alone that have done all that ; not I, nor any of my good works. For if God treated me according to them, he would give me no other place in Hell but under the feet of Lucifer, being the place I deserve. But his great mercy makes me hope he will treat me not according to my works, but according to his goodness.” . . .

“ The more my divine Love caressed me, the

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more I saw my baseness and my nothingness ; so that often I was as if astonished and beside myself that such high Majesty should be willing thus to communicate himself to a poor servant ; and sometimes I said to myself, Were it not that I well know my Love sees and knows all, I would think that he does not see my abjectness. Often also these views were taken away, for the force of love raised me above myself and prevented me dwelling on myself or anything which concerned me, and when I had told my Confessors the great graces shown me, I lost all recollection of them, Love so powerfully occupied me that nothing remained to me save HE ALONE."

In the outflowings of Divine Charity which filled her she thus interceded for those who neglected and despised God's light. "I wept their faults with continued tears, and I had my heart so full of tenderness and compassion for them that I felt their sufferings more than my own. Love furnished me with a thousand inventions to excuse them to God. I cried incessantly for mercy on them. Day and night I cast myself at his sacred feet to obtain their pardon. I said to him that they were his children, that they had cost the blood of his Son and that for his love he must save them, that they were poor blind ones, who knew not what

they were doing ; that if they had known, they never would have offended him ; that in short they were my brothers, whose loss I could not endure, and that I felt it as my own ; and the Goodness of my God was so great towards me that he made me know, that since they were my brothers he would have pity on them. What an excess of Goodness ! therefore since then I give them hardly any name but that of ' My brothers.' It seems that when I have said to him ' My Love and my All ! they are my brothers : pardon them ; have mercy on them ' ; I have nothing more to say to recommend them and to obtain his pity for them : so excessive was his love towards his poor servant."

Of poverty of spirit she thus spoke :—

" Oh ! happy those who abandon everything ! for they will find all ; but we must abandon even up to the least part of ourselves ; not only in what we see to be bad, but further in what we believe to be good. For God never will reign in us until we shall have entirely given ourselves up to him and allow him to do in us what to him seems good, without our troubling ourselves at what he shall do, or allow to be done. Therefore since he has made me know him so clearly as I know him, I let him do all he pleases. If he makes himself seen and felt by me, I let him

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do so. If he keeps hidden and concealed, I do not ask to see him. In short, he is master and king of my heart. There he has established his reign and is there so absolute that I sometimes say to him, that it seems to me he will not be more so in Heaven."

"He has taken from me everything and he has given me Himself, and having him I esteem myself more rich than if I possessed all the riches of Heaven and earth. I am but a poor village girl, but in my poverty I possess all good, all peace, all joy, all contentment, because I have my God, who is my All; and in possessing him, all that is his is mine; as all that there was of me is now by his grace all his."

Here is a description of her Daily Practice :—

"It seemed that I was the child of Love and that he was my Father and my Guide, who led me as if by the hand to all I had to do: and as for me, I had no other care but to look at him and do what he commanded me without ever departing therefrom. He taught me to regard him so continually that from morning to night I had no other object in my thoughts, and if at times I was in the least diverted, immediately I placed myself again in his divine Presence and there I worked to please him alone. I conversed with him during my work. I loved him

and rejoiced in him. I treated with him as with my most intimate friend, and if occupations called me, which required all my attention, I had, however, my heart always turned to him, and when they were finished I ran to him again, exactly as does a person who passionately loves another : whatever business he has he only half leaves him. I was exactly the same with my God, from whom it was impossible for me to separate and I could live only in his presence ; for I knew well and he himself taught me, that as long as I kept my look on him I could not offend him or prevent myself from loving him."

"The more I looked at him, the more I knew his divine perfections and my nothingness and wretchedness ; so that I forgot myself, and abandoned myself as a thing unworthy of thought to rise above myself and all created things, to unite and attach myself incessantly to him. All my end was to please him in what I did and to watch against offending him. In all my actions I thought of nothing else. This I did not for the benefit that might accrue to me, nor to avoid the ill which would have followed my doing otherwise ; all these views and interests were so remote from my mind that I never thought of them. Love alone carried off everything for him, and provided he was content, I was satisfied."

“As to my daily practices, they were just as I have said. On my first awaking I threw myself into the arms of my Divine Love, as a child does into those of his father. I got up to serve him and to work, in order to please him. If I had time to pray, I placed myself on my knees in his divine Presence and spoke to him as if I saw him with my eyes. There I offered myself entirely to him. I prayed him that in me might be accomplished all his holy wills, and that he would not permit me to offend him in the slightest thing. Moreover I offered to him all the Masses that during the day would be said throughout Christendom, and prayed him to apply their merits for relief of souls in Purgatory. In short, I occupied myself in him and his praises as often as my work allowed me ; but generally I had not time to say a *Pater* or an *Ave* during the whole day. But I did not in the least trouble myself at it. It was as much to my heart to work for him as to pray to him ; because he had taught me that whatever is done for his love is a true prayer.”

“I dressed myself in his company, and he showed me that his love furnished me with clothing. When I was at my work, he did not leave me, nor did I quit him. He worked with me and I with him ; I was always as united

and attached to him as when at prayer. Oh ! how sweet and easy to bear were all my troubles in such good company ! Therefore I drew from it such strength and courage that nothing was hard to me, and I would have liked by myself to have done the whole work of the household. I had only my body at work ; the heart and all myself burned with love in the sweet familiarity I had with him. If I took my food, it was in his divine Presence, as well as all the rest, and it seemed to me that every morsel was soaked in his precious Blood, and that he himself gave it to nourish me, that I might burn still more from his love."

" If in the course of the day, amidst bother and continual occupations, the body felt fatigue and would have liked to complain, murmur, take its ease, or let itself be carried away to anger or some other movement of disorderly passion, immediately Love enlightened me and showed me that I ought to kill these rebellions of nature and not encourage them by word or action. He was as the gatekeeper of my mouth and a guard to my heart, that nothing might contribute to nourish these irregular movements, and thus they were constrained to die at their birth. If at times I was not sufficiently upon my guard, and allowed myself to be carried away

by surprise to some fault, I could not endure until I had obtained my pardon and peace was made between him and me. I wept at his sacred feet and told him my fault as if he had not seen it ; I confessed my weakness to him and could not stir from there until he had pardoned me, and friendship was become stronger than ever, which through his goodness and mercy happened all the times I fell into faults ; and this only served to burn me still more with his divine Love. When men persecuted me by their slanders and ill-treatment, and the devils in their temptations and vain artifices, at the same moment I turned to my Love, and he stretched his sacred arms to me and showed me his Heart and his wounds open, to lodge me within and keep me safe. Therefore I thrust myself in there as into my true Fortress, and there I was stronger than all Hell ; and though all creatures had risen up against me I would have had no more fear of them than of a fly ; for I was under the safe guard and protection of Love."

" If at times he himself left me and made a show of withdrawing, I used to say, ' Oh ! it does not matter, my Love ; it is idle for you to conceal yourself. I will not the less serve you ; for I know that you are my God.' And then I tried to keep more on my guard than ever and to be

more faithful, lest I should displease my Love ; for that was my only apprehension. During those times I recognised more my paltriness and my poverty, and I trusted myself more to our Lord, being content to be in that state all my life, if it was his pleasure. But he hardly left me in it at all ; if I dared say so, I would say, that he could not prevent himself from caressing me, any more than I could live without him. For in requital for one moment of absence, on his return he loaded me with so many graces, such tender and divine favours that I could not support them ; and often I was constrained to cry that I could stand no more, and that he should moderate them, or I would die under the burden of his graces. It was vain for me to cry out to him, that it was not his caresses and his graces I asked, but HIM ALONE without other things. I had to suffer and support them since such was his holy Will."

Much more follows of the same character relating to her attendance at Mass and Confession and other religious ceremonies.

"Such has been the life of a poor peasant, and a mean servant since Love divine had been willing to undertake her guidance. Here is how he drew me from the misery of my sins and ignorance to make me what I am through his

great mercy !! Such is the life I led for twenty years, without ever feeling the least diminution of the love he poured into my heart from the moment of my entire conversion !

“ It is in his infinite Love I find myself satiated and satisfied, and until I reached this my soul always was a-hungry, though it seemed to me I could not have more than what I had at each moment. Now I did not reach this until by his great goodness it pleased him to introduce me into his house. (See Chap. xv.) I had for twenty years,” said she, “lodged in my own, leading the life I have just described. But after that time he made me enter into his ; which is nothing else but HIMSELF. Since that time what passes in me is so exalted above all that there was previously, that it is impossible to make it understood. The creature seems to be there entirely lost. The spirit is so raised above the earth that it does not seem to be on it. The peace is so profound, the joy so perfected, that the soul thinks herself already entered into the peace and joy of God—transformed into God.”

On the 10th August 1671 Armelle was attacked by severe fever, which, after abating somewhat in severity, ultimately carried her off on the 24th October following. The whole town was concerned at the news of her illness, and numbers

filled the room of the dying woman on the last days. Her master ordered that her body should be treated with the same honour as if she was his own daughter, and when it lay covered in white with the funeral candles around, he came with uncovered head, knelt at the foot and kissed the bare feet. All his family and many other persons did the same.

According to her desire the body was buried in the Chapel of the Ursuline Convent in front of the Grand Altar though the Chapter desired to have it buried within the Cathedral. The heart enclosed in lead was taken as a relic by the Jesuit College, one of the members of which composed for her tomb the following Epitaph.

HERE LIES THE BODY OF
ARMELLE NICOLAS
A PEASANT BY BIRTH ; BY OCCUPATION A SERVANT,
COMMONLY CALLED
THE GOOD ARMELLE
AND IN THE INEFFABLE COMMUNICATIONS
SHE HAD WITH GOD
THE DAUGHTER OF LOVE.
SHE DIED ON EARTH TO LIVE IN HEAVEN
THE 24TH OCTOBER 1671 AGED 65 YEARS
PRAY FOR HER SOUL AND WALK IN HER STEPS
BY LOVING GOD AS SHE DID.
REQUIESCAT IN PACE
AMEN



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